

COOL SLUT: THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN CHASTITY BELT'S APPROACH
TO FEMINISM

by

AMBER PERRY

(Under the Direction of John Soloski)

ABSTRACT

The band Chastity Belt's visual image is consistent with its lyrical content in that they challenge feminine stereotypes through a satirical approach not commonly seen in popular music. I employ a visual social semiotic analysis to investigate the meaning potentials that emerge from using satire to complicate normative conceptions of both femininity and feminism in their music video "Cool Slut." I examine how the music video's semiotic resources organize the text and its impact on the viewer's experience, particularly through a critical reading of whiteness and queer spectatorship. I also analyze the influence of industry on the music video, including a detailed history, which is to illustrate how the music video is used to market a label. The music video hosts qualities that its label champions both explicitly and implicitly, adding layers of meaning to the context-dependent analysis.

INDEX WORDS: music video, feminist media studies, queer reading, social semiotics, critical discourse, satire, spectatorship, gaze, media industry, independent label

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DEDICATION

To music, one of life's greatest wonders.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Music matters because it has the potential to enrich people's lives, and enrich societies.

—David Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters*¹

I must start off with the power of music. That is essentially what this thesis is about. I attend shows almost compulsively. Listening, seeing, feeling the music and the camaraderie in intimate spaces, even the arenas, is something I will never tire of. Being in front of a stage or lying on my bed listening to full albums or curated playlists, enjoying the crackle produced by a needle on vinyl, screeching to music riding in the car going down a highway reminds me of its discursive role in society. I know this idea is shared by much of the world. It tells me I am not alone with some specific feeling. It brings people together—after all, one of the first questions I ask strangers is who their go-to artists are. Music supplements many places and objects, like hearing music while shopping or the score in a movie. It sets the tone, the vibe if you will, of whatever the music is attached to. I often think about how movies would be without the dramatic, frazzled sound of orchestra playing alongside moments meant to instill fear. It would be awkward, would it not? Then comes along music video, the site of analysis of this thesis, which is another meaningful, more complex convention.

I have observed the status of music video in culture over many years watching them for my own enjoyment, but also for a certain kind of education. I remember MTV before it became a hub for reality television. This went for VH1 as well. I recall staying up until the early hours

¹ See Hesmondhalgh's (2013) book for a detailed examination of the social value of music.

watching whatever music videos were playing at the time. I remember surfing Comcast's, now Xfinity, On Demand feature for music videos from bands I liked and repeatedly watching them until I could not anymore. It is funny to look back on how immersed I was in the narrative, typically a romantic one, and at that time, I did not even know what romance was. I just knew I wanted to be like the video's characters, only not the heartbreak part. They taught me what it would be like, or what it is supposed to be like, to be a young woman in the world.² The pairing of image with song can reinforce and mold a sense of identity even more than what is simply audible. The music itself takes more interpretative work and is more prone to confirmation bias, in my experience, sharpening the connection between personal experience and the interpreted experiences of the musician. On the other hand, music videos are created in such a way that tells the viewer where to go, some more than others.

Music videos also shed light onto a song's meaning, a meaning that I may have had trouble understanding prior to the application of image.³ Music videos bring forth new and critical perspectives to a song. Depending on the style, music videos can muddle meanings too, acting as a kind of exciting safeguard to whatever truth we think it has, like parents refusing to tell their child that Santa does not exist for the sake of magic. The narrative grows in strength because of the mystery. The way that music moves us, stirs us to emotion or to thought or to action suggests that music and its outside texts must be studied. The way that their commentaries on society unveils important, formative experiences and how they allow audiences a creative power affirms this need. Viewers might try to emulate their most relatable ethos and aesthetic,

² This is a concept reminiscent of Jennifer Hurley's (1994) piece on the ability of music video to construct gendered subjectivity.

³ Vernallis (2004) writes that images in the music video can "serve as a guide to teach us about the salient features in a song" (p. 52).

for better or for worse. I know I did. The music video that I am choosing to analyze had the same effect on me. As I dissected the music video, I searched within myself to uncover what it was that I think being a woman is or should be. These perspectives evolved throughout the process and will continue to evolve as I encounter the things, like music video, that make me question them.

Music Video Selection for Analysis

For this thesis, I analyze Chastity Belt's "Cool Slut" music video. Chastity Belt is an alternative rock band, consisting of Julia Shapiro (vocals/guitar), Lydia Lund (guitar), Annie Truscott (bass) and Gretchen Grimm (drums), formed in Walla Walla, Washington, in 2010 and is now an indie staple in the Seattle music scene. The band's music video "Cool Slut" is a satirical piece incorporating a visual politic that speaks to a feminist ethos and effectively grounds itself in a well-known era of music by using a lo-fi and campy aesthetic: the '90s, when appropriating girlhood became a tool for women musicians in rock 'n' roll to make a statement, when sitcoms used its same campy editing styles and made girls the star in an empowering narrative. The decade is also when music cultures, particularly Seattle music culture, used some of the music video's same aesthetic techniques. These techniques move along a narrative of characters played by the band members, characters who exhibit static and dynamic qualities through different situations. The music video appropriates girlhood, using stereotypes and cultural references to do so. I examine these among other aspects of the video that speak to how the music video dismantles what a slut is. I take from Feona Attwood's (2007) article, which examines the history of the term and articulates varied meanings surrounding it. In the article, she describes its usage dating back centuries, from the sex- and gender-less definitions of centuries past that pertain to untidiness up to the 20th century's version — an abusive word

meant to denigrate women who did not adhere to societal double standards (Attwood, 2007, p. 233). My analysis illustrates how the video reinvents the word but also how its reinvention results in a vast number of interpretations, privy to a social semiotic method.

I investigate various facets of the music video, looking to the structures and techniques that communicate an ambivalent set of values. These values are situated in a particular social and cultural position, which pave the way for audiences to interpret critical meanings. To analyze these values, I apply a social semiotic method, which reaches beyond the structure of signs and signifiers to consider their social and cultural context. The social semiotic method is a powerful tool, one that can explicate the “inter-connectedness between the people’s agency, the technologies in use, and the social context of the meaning making,” lending to the approach’s ability to explore power relations “materially instantiated” (Jewitt and Henriksen, 2016, p. 161). Social semiotics also places importance on the dynamic character of signs, or what are referred to as “meaning potentials,” and how they can disrupt hegemonic discourses, following a critical discourse analysis. Theo Van Leeuwen, a key scholar of social semiotics, defines meaning potentials as texts having the signifying potential, rather than specific meanings (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Regarding music, he writes that the “act of making music, and listening to music, is by nature a form of social interaction, and the relations of power and solidarity that are created by musical interaction are a primary source of musical meaning” (p. 322). What audiences glean from musicians is a byproduct of an important process, which constructs meaning through myriad semiotic resources in music, and even more in music video. Although the interpretation of the band’s motivations is subjective, the drive behind employing all semiotic resources in the video has ideological implications that the viewer cannot evade. Sign-making is always motivated, not arbitrary (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

When applied to the visual, social semiotics examines the representational, interactive and compositional elements, which look to the story, the interaction between the visual and the viewer and the organization of semiotic resources that work to create narrative, respectively (Aiello & Parry, 2019, citing Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Namely, I examine the meaning potentials gathered from the text in how it signals the past, appropriates girlhood, uses juxtaposition with image and song, interacts with Chastity Belt's other work, specifically the *Time to Go Home* specifically, which is where "Cool Slut" is situated. I also look at how the music video plays with gaze to position viewers as well as the influence of industry on the music video's aesthetics. Social semiotics can lack the sociological implications of the text and usually requires other social theories to "bridge the micro-analysis to the macro-concerns of the social" (Jewitt & Henricksen, 2016, p. 162). This gives reason for extending the analysis to tease out the micro with dynamics within audience via satire and spectatorship as well as industrial practices that manifest in the text. All work together to expound on the social and power relations that are implied within the video and exist outside the video.

A Feminist Sense of Humor

In her edited collection of critical responses to women's humor throughout history, Morris (1994) notes that "scholarship on women's humor was a fledgling art" a few years before her book was published. Since then, several other scholars have discussed the potential of feminist satire and its importance in society (Crawford, 1995; Bing, 2004; Abrams, 2017; Greene, 2020). Crawford (1995) notes, "the relationship between gender and humor can be analyzed at all levels of the gender system" (p. 129). This argument offers itself to an even more meaningful analysis, and how it infiltrates a multi-tiered system of entrenched patriarchy. My analysis offers a signification contribution because of its relevance to the broader sociocultural

context. Crawford (1995) argues that “the political uses of humor by feminists indicate the potential of the humor mode to infiltrate and disrupt dominant meanings” (p. 129). If humor, specifically satire, can revolutionize the way people think in a society that promotes a plethora of hegemonic discourses, it is worth studying.

On women’s humor, Crawford (1995) highlights an interesting paradox: “If we accept the argument that humor is a subordinate mode of discourse that rarely disrupts social hierarchies, there seems to be no reason for the culture to represent women as lacking a sense of humor” (p. 153). While women’s humor has been studied before, proven in academic literature and in the real world, the notion of unfunny women still exists. I have seen this play out first-hand. “Wow, you’re so funny,” says the person who acts as if this observation is incredulous. I am sure this same phenomenon happens to other women as well. So, in part, I simply advocate that women can be funny. In the video, the band exaggerates behavior, ties itself to another decade and plays with gaze to evoke a sense of solidarity of women who can relate to oppressive societal conventions. It would be natural that the video’s cheesy transitions from one frame to the next, the stooge-like clumsiness of each band member’s stock character and misplaced sensuality offers itself as a joke. In the case of “Cool Slut,” the source of humor is its satire, which is not subtle but also not too ridiculous to be tasteless.

Part of my argument rests on the fact that feminist satire is not always abrasive as what may be assumed, particularly if an “inclusive” feminist satire is used. An effect of the humor mode, an indirect and allusive form of communication, is that it “protects the joker from the consequences that his or her statement would have conveyed directly in the serious mode” (Crawford, 1995). Criticizing social hierarchy through a joke, a more subtle and inclusive one, is a productive strategy that reaches multiple audiences. The video’s satire makes consequences of

exclusion easier to dodge, validating itself as a useful ideological tool. The precision of the message's intention evades the viewer, but the viewer understands that *something* relatively progressive is conveyed. An inclusive feminist satire creates but also problematizes gendered and sexualized in-groups and out-groups, therein evoking an important queer liminal gaze. The potential for a reading of lesbian satire and lesbian gaze, related but not a direct relationship, consumes a significant part of this thesis. The "Cool Slut" music video uses techniques that make this possible, like close-ups and the dynamic among the band members—both used as a feminist satire rhetorical device. While this music video was selected for such "obvious"⁴ readings, queer readings are always possible for the queer. They are an important act for those who do not often see themselves as part of the narrative, but who also do not readily gain satisfaction of desire. As a result, this study which acknowledges a queer presence grants greater access to those who continue to experience marginalization.

A noteworthy outcome of this thesis is its application to other sites of study. Scholars in social semiotics have recognized music and music videos as a site of analysis, but this study extends the analysis in significant ways. Academic research on satire is especially lacking in the realm of popular music, yet there are myriad satirical pieces and accompanying music videos that exist which can be evaluated; moreover, from my searches, a social semiotic analysis on a satirical music piece is nonexistent. This study, which holds to a social semiotic method, thoroughly tends to context and does so critically. Tending to a critical discourse is an integral facet to social semiotics. Signs and signifiers exist because where they are and who they are read by, and their sometimes-clandestine character makes it more imperative that they are closely

⁴ I use the term "obvious," but my perspectives are not necessarily, and most likely, not recognizable to a heteronormative audience.

analyzed on multiple levels, as I do here. I recognize its potentially empowering *and* problematic qualities, problematic insofar as the pitfalls of its feminism, noted with an awareness to polysemy—a perpetuation of stereotypes and male gaze, however rhetorical, as well as an important an analysis of its embedment on a historically problematic label, which manifests in the video’s aesthetics. This is to avoid what Fairclough (1995) calls out: “A basic assumption is that media texts do not merely ‘mirror realities’ as is sometimes naively consumed; they constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interest and objective of those who produce them” (p. 104). While this thesis is not focused on intention, it is important to at least acknowledge the video and the band as part of a label with a colored history, a by-product of its environment.

The Need for Self-reflexivity

Chastity Belt’s powerful performance in music video seemingly provides a high level of certainty of their positions, as if the task of interpreting their music and video is quite easy to manage. However, satire prohibits mere surface readings and intentionally creates a convolution that must be deconstructed. Questions arise and my objective is to problematize the potential answers. As a viewer, I negotiate meaning, neither accepting the dominant message nor working in an entirely different framework, but the way that the text positions the viewer relies on particular social positions of viewers as well.⁵ Despite my own social position as woman, as feminist, as queer, as someone who has participated in the alternative music scene, this study calls for the need of reflexivity and an emphasize on a self-questioning analytic process.

⁵ Stuart Hall’s (1973/2007) work on encoding and decoding explains how culture is a site of “negotiation,” where intended meanings can be stymied in transmission. Hall asserts that audience reception should not be reduced to “isolated elements” like effects, uses or gratifications because even those are “framed by structures of understanding, as well as being produced by social and economic relations, which shape their realization” (p. 93).

So, I may have cultural knowledge that allows me to capture symbols that might otherwise go unnoticed, facilitating a recognition of certain allusions. I may be “in” on the joke because I understand the stereotypes that the band members employ through their characters. I may see exploitative camera angles as humorously provoking sexually objectifying gaze but also how the subtext inside moments of sexual tension excites a lesbian desire. My insights are intensified through close reading, through hopping back and forth between image, song and lyrics, attempting to clarify what it is all supposed to mean, or what it has the potential to mean. However, I must also consider how the music video achieves authenticity in how it positions the viewer by presupposing the viewer “as someone who is already familiar with the culture and community depicted (Fairclough, 1995, p. 107). I must look at my position as something susceptible to ignoring critical components that can adequately question and doubt this music video.

It is imperative that I retain reflexivity in this case study, especially as it involves music, a system of aesthetic symbols, where “listeners make sense of stresses involved in living that defy linear and discursive expression” (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 398, citing Rasmussen, 1994, p. 151). I interpret and attempt to problematize the interpretation, putting it up for debate for a reconsideration. I pause and consult other possibility. This interpretative study makes visible those whose perceptions are not widely noted, or even accepted, which reaches outside of myself. A significant portion of this analysis argues that the video’s complexities, the satire and its resulting feminist message is a performance of social struggle, which recenters marginalized viewers in areas of ambiguity. Throughout the analysis, I use the term “viewer” to allude to the ways in which the text *could* position the viewer, particularly the lesbian viewer. This person is

imagined, an amalgam, but a vital tool for discovering the importance of music video to culture for a marginalized group.

Thesis Organization

The methodological framework of social semiotics, which has a keen eye on critical discourse, helps craft the chapters of this thesis. All chapters play a pivotal role in answering the fundamental questions related to the text: how the visuality of the video complicates a feminist message, how audience productivity in terms of spectatorship stems in satire and subtextual references to a nonheteronormative desire and lastly, how Seattle's rock history and culture grounds the text. The chosen method allows me to examine the ways in which the band uses satire to undermine normative conceptions of both femininity and feminism in the "Cool Slut" music video, account for the meanings of varied spectatorship and recognize the band's position in the music industry, their place on an "independent" label at large and the influences of industrial power structures on the text. With the key points of analysis combined, I robustly illustrate how Chastity Belt's feminist persona positions itself in the popular culture and the patriarchal system at large. Throughout the thesis, I insert screenshots of the music video which serve to illustrate different points of discussion.

First, I begin with offering a vital context, which is a characterization of Chastity Belt illustrated by its body of work and collaborative efforts. I then break down music video by its formal, salient structures and discuss the relevance of social semiotics to music video, using moments in the music video to illustrate those claims. I move on to drawing on the music video's semiotic resources—the structural components—to tease out themes that emerge through close reading. These are the video's temporality, contradictory depictions of girlhood, use of stereotypes, juxtaposition between image and song and the critical absences that affect audience

perception. These themes that I extract serve as a comprehensive interpretation of the narrative, which is then further pulled apart in terms of spectatorship and acknowledgement of music video as brand.

The latter half of the thesis serves to expound upon representations in the video, specifically with an examination of gendered and sexualized spectatorship. I examine how Chastity Belt uses satire, a political form, to create in-groups and out-groups, which in turn creates the gaze. I also discuss polysemy in popular culture to reinforce the meaningful production that occurs within the audience, adding vital insight into the complexities and elusive qualities of music video that make textual interpretation channel multiple positions. Because of the always prevailing ties of music video to capitalist ethos, I end my work with an interrogation of industry culture on the independent label and attempt to establish a dialectic between agency and the commercial system. To do this, I examine how industry affects autonomy and authenticity, which further a necessary critical discourse surrounding the text. I investigate implications of ‘indie’⁶ industry culture, which is a highly influential set of values that the video is situated in and what adds more layers of meaning to the aesthetics of the text. Despite the subversive nature of feminist/lesbian satire, the video’s compositional elements that are used to convey an arguably feminist and anti-capitalist ideology, conceal the influence of record label. This is problematically misleading. I find it imperative that I explore these modes of analysis for a more comprehensive, thorough project. I implore their connection to the aesthetics and ideologies found within music video itself, which affect the viewer and are influenced by exclusionary industrial practices and longstanding marketing strategies.

⁶ The term “indie” is synonymous with underground music. Initially a revolt against the popular music industry, Hesmondhalgh (1999) explores the institutionalization of indie, or how its aesthetics have become a part of the mainstream.

CHAPTER II

CHASTITY BELT, THE BAND

Chastity Belt carves out a unique space in the rock world via a humorous approach not commonly seen in popular music, known for their jabs at gender dynamics. Their label Hardly Art, which is a “sister label” of Sub Pop, highlights the band on their website’s About page,⁷ calling Chastity Belt a “breakout act.” Hardly Art is the first record label nominated for a Stranger Genius Award, an award given out by critics of the same-named, Seattle-based publication. In an article from *The Stranger*, Nelson (2016) writes, “It’s worth taking a moment to consider how influential this label has been in fostering the current golden age of Seattle rock music” and that the label is one to have “thrived in the era of the death of the record label.” Hardly Art hosts several feminist rock bands, including Chastity Belt’s unconventional and relatively radical feminist stance. I use the term “radical” when comparing it to more popular artists, which make the band and their “Cool Slut” music video a worthwhile site of study. Yet, the band is big enough on a big enough imprint on the much more historically celebrated label, Sub Pop, to make a difference.

⁷ <https://www.hardlyart.com/about>



Figure 2.1. Through clothing, members of Chastity Belt transpose themselves in the '50s era, an era that held intense expectations of women, like keeping to the domestic sphere. The lead singer also wears a chastity belt made from meat, connoting the objectification of women's bodies. When asked about the conception of their band name, Shapiro said, "I think we thought it was funny? And feminist in a way?" (Heng, 2015). In this image, the juxtaposition between the depression-era vintage dresses and the explicit nature of the photograph lends to a well-meaning revised history. Creating juxtaposition through temporality persists in the "Cool Slut" music video as well. (Photo by Sara Creighton)

Chastity Belt's ethos, often communicated through satire, burns into the music and their visual representations. For an example of this approach in music, the band's first EP ends with "James Dean," a song eventually placed on their debut album *No Regerts* [sic], where Shapiro sings, "Oh boy, when I fuck you / You make me feel like a prostitute / Yeah, when you fuck me / I make you feel just like James Dean." The lyrics, like the consistent rhythm of guitar and percussion, are simple, yet they effectively communicate a widely felt dynamic—the objectification of woman in the act of sex and the simultaneous hoisting of her male counterpart into a something like a cultural icon. In the song, one can hear the "goofily sarcastic warm spirit in the politics-of-sport-fucking" (Green, 2013). The song's raw, serious statement may make finding the humor difficult. However, the humor is the reduction of phenomenon to the essential and hammering the satire into the microphone. A deadpan tune that pokes and caricaturizes

weighty issues manages to spark a smirk, and maybe satirizing situations that produced a well-known, widely felt pain is an act of reclaiming. The song and other like it destabilize listeners' understanding of widespread compulsory heterosexuality.

Since the inception of the band, members of Chastity Belt have taken part in other projects, most of which take on feminist themes. Importantly, Julia Shapiro's is involved with Childbirth, a three-piece rock band consisting of Shapiro, Stacy Peck of Pony Time, who is also noted to have inspired the "Cool Slut" video as well as acting as director and editor of Chastity Belt's "Seattle Party" music video, and Bree Mckenna of Taco Cat. Childbirth was formed in 2013, originally signed to Help Yourself Records and currently on Suicide Squeeze Records. In an interview, the band talked about originally staying together for nine months and breaking up, their axed ideas for live performance (e.g., using real-time ultrasound recordings of pregnant friends on stage), the release of dish-washing-glove-yellow vinyl and offending a bunch of people, primarily women, with their music (Noonan & Tady, 2015). The interview was loaded with quips related to normative gender roles—their absurdist ethos made evident. The iconicity of their live performance as well as musical content, e.g., a song titled "More Fertile Than You," consistently prod at the regulatory status of pregnancy in womanhood. Pregnancy is not the only issue that Childbirth tackles in their music—other hot topics like nonnormative sexuality, the (un)ironic notion of desiring to be desired (as an object) and marriage structures are highlighted.



Figure 2.2. Bree Mckenna, Stacy Peck and Julia Shapiro laugh while eating salad in maternity gowns. Women laughing alone eating salad is a meme, whose origins come from the proliferation of this image in stock photography. The phenomenon was highlighted by Edith Zimmerman (2011) on *The Hairpin*, a general interest website aimed at women. The post is a series of stock photographs and without any commentary—and it went viral with over 206,000 Facebook shares and 15,000 Tweets (Heing, 2015). The meme even became of the premise of the play *Women Laughing Alone With Salad*—to which Heing (2015) describes as “simultaneously laugh out loud and painfully poignant in its exploration of the ways women interact with media, advertising, and the many messages we're sent about the things we're supposed to want.” (Photo taken from Childbirth’s Facebook page)

When asked about the Childbirth’s comedic voice for feminism, Stacy Peck said that their approach is part of their personalities, dealing with things in their daily lives by making jokes. Peck said:

We can be serious, and we definitely care about things, but it just feels the most natural for us to express things in this way. And, unfortunately, I think [the messages] go down a little easier for people this way. I don’t think that there’s a wrong or right way to be a band or express feminism, and it kind of bothers me when some people are like, “finally, fun feminism!” Because everything is valid and relevant and still important, but this is just how it makes sense for us to do it. (Sommerfield, 2015)

As Peck expressed, the content is serious, but done humorously. For the band, satire overcomes personal (and gendered) quandaries, and satire is a rhetorical, political device to elicit a smoother message to transcend obstacles for understanding the daily dilemma of women. Childbirth's approach to feminism, while more ridiculous, takes on the same character of Chastity Belt in their earlier work. However, Chastity Belt eventually diverged from a path of pure humor and satire.

Over the past 10 years, Chastity Belt's lyrics and sound have evolved from loosely played instruments and humorous, explicit lyrics to arrive at the sentimentality heard today. Members of Chastity Belt have claimed to have grown in confidence to tackle more serious projects, "moving past the jokes, writing better music, and keeping their eye-rolling punk roots intact" (Heng, 2015). However, although there remain moments of humorous, feminist irreverence can be heard *and* seen in recent works. The hard-edged song "Cool Slut," its video the key focus of this study, can be found on the *Time to Go Home*'s listing, debatably contrasting the rest of the album's dewy-eyed tracks. *Time to Go Home* is their second full-length album, still in the beginning stages of turning to sentimentality, but more tender than their debut. These ambivalent emotive qualities of Chastity Belt's work are further explored in this thesis regarding its impact on the music video.

Members of Chasity Belt come from a long line of tradition of women in music. In her book *Music and Women*, Sophie Drinker (1948) unveils an extensive history of women's relationship with music, dating back to primitive groups. Drinker establishes the varied histories of women who used music as a tool of empowerment for the self and community, highlight the fact that women musicians were chief in many senses, including repositories for racial expression and transmitters of history. Harding and Nett (1984) also give an historical account,

but with a more critical lens to say that rock music has been male dominated from its onset in the 1950s and that women have been used to sell the music through its imagery. After Harding and Nett's (1984) article was published, the Riot Grrrl movement, grounded in antiestablishment punk music, entered the frame. The movement currently stands as a pivotal historical moment as it characterized as one of the first manifestations of third-wave feminism (Klein, 1997). Within the Riot Grrrl movement, women were allowed "to challenge norms and ideas of the feminine while producing music, art and culture on their own terms" (Downes, 2007, p. 18). Riot Grrrl sought to empower women by providing a space of reinvention, where roles could be stripped away. The inclusion and emphasis of Riot Grrrl in this case study is not to say that Chastity Belt is a "riot grrrl band," as others would caution against (Schilt, 2003; Wiedlack, 2016).⁸ However, the music found during this time of a Riot Grrrl revolution and its reclamation of identity has persisted through time, arguably exhibited in the "Cool Slut" music video.

In contemporary music, women continue to embolden the movement's revised feminist forms. Contrary to the provocations of Riot Grrrl, bell hooks describes the value of an alternative but *nonreactionary* community that allows identification with the Other (Shoemaker, 1997, citing hooks).

The reactionary community built on a fascist model of bonding together in the face of the Other in order to control or destroy it. Alternative communities are built through the

⁸ Schilt's article looks at the problematic appropriation of Riot Grrrl in current music. Wiedlack's (2016) article questions Pussy Riot's characterization as a Riot Grrrl band, which "not only sketches a description lacking in deeper understanding and explanation, but also produces inadequate assumptions about the group and their politics" (p. 411). Wiedlack (2016) adds the intersection of Westernization to her critique, as Pussy Riot is a feminist band from Russia.

intentional tearing down of boundaries through empathizing with the Other and allowing identification with that Other” (Shoemaker, 1997, p. 118)

Members of Chastity Belt exemplify hooks’ strategy through an inclusive feminist satire, elucidated later in this thesis. Perhaps, the band, through an ambivalent satire, does attempt to reimagine a sisterhood⁹ which is “inclusive of all strands of feminism,” and this is done even if Elizabeth Evans (2014) claims that this endeavor is not “not easy to conceive of” (p. 132). Lydia Lund said, lead guitarist from Chastity Belt, said, “We did this panel with [music critic Jessica Hopper] where she talked a lot about the riot grrrl movement and how everyone felt like they had to yell to get attention, and I don't feel like we have to yell anymore. I’m so grateful for that” (Kelly, 2015). But like architects of the movement, Chastity Belt is reinventing themselves and doing it with in-your-face finesse—they are creating from the space between a progressing society and ever-present modes of gendered oppression. While Lund claims that women musicians do not have to “yell to get attention,” the music industry is still male dominated and can be correlated with misogynistic outpouring (North, Krause & Ritchie, 2020).

⁹ Sisterhood is a second-wave concept criticized for being essentialist and ignorant of intersectionality.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL SEMIOTICS IN MUSIC VIDEO

Music videos are a major site of inquiry, supported by the discourses of many scholars of popular music and music video. Railton and Watson (2011) list a variety of reasons why music videos merit research and make that clear throughout *Music Videos and the Politics of Representation* via examples that elicit critical provocation. They argue that music video has multiple impacts, like pleasure or the natural response to analyze and understand the attached meanings. The view that grants texts, music videos included, great importance allows a social analysis that investigates “questions of knowledge, belief and ideology ... questions of social relationships and power, and questions of identity” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 17). Meanings expressed through media are always social and help to characterize social life, reflecting “differences, incongruities and clashes,”¹⁰ a point that increases the need to study music video scholarship.

The impact of media texts not only exists in the selectivity of representations, as Fairclough argues, but more important is “what sorts of social identities, what versions of ‘self’, they project and what cultural values (be it consumerism, individual or a cult of personality) these entail” (1995, p.17). It is important to investigate embedded ideologies of the text, or the “propositions that generally figure as implicit assumptions in texts, which contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power, relations of domination” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 14). Through text, analysts can examine various power structures and the routes that

¹⁰ Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 20

might undermine them. Critical discourse analyses offer a voice to marginalized groups (Jancsary, Höllerer & Meyer, 2016). When applying this method to music video, especially one that hinges on feminist ethos and can be read in an oppositional way by different marginalized groups, the text becomes more substantial. Social semiotics, which invariably critiques text structure and representation, is an appropriate method of analysis because it magnifies the elements that compose its ideology and by extension the ideologies that it tries to upend.

Aiello and Parry (2019) provide a list of questions that define social semiotics and critical discourse analysis, which are segmented separately but deeply relevant to one another. As a general framework, these questions guide this study of how Chastity Belt's performative and aesthetic dimensions and how visual politics play a key role in music video, more generally. Because Chastity Belt, a feminist alternative rock band, employs satire through the music video and the song, and it is through satire that political sentiments emerge for the viewer to grasp. To analyze social semiotics presented in the text, this study focuses on three types of meanings: representational, interactive and compositional meanings (Aiello & Parry, 2019, citing Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The representational meaning is derived from the "story" of the music video; the interactive meaning concerns the relationship between the viewer and the music video; the compositional meaning is pulled from the organizational aspects of the images within the music video.

Aiello and Parry (2019) provide a summation of critical discourse analysis, what they consider "in line" with social semiotics. Employing a critical discourse analysis is imperative to this study, which examines a text situated in a feminist ethos, inculcated with commentary on power dynamics. The authors borrow from Norman Fairclough's work to suggest a three-prong examination of cultural practice, discourse practice and text, which rejects the notion of an

“isolated” text (citing Fairclough, 1995). Critical discourse analysis is concerned with semiotic data related to the visual features that identify a group, the agency of those actors and the positioning of the spectator (Aiello & Parry, 2019, citing Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The social semiotic method and critical discourse “research program”¹¹ are detailed in the second section of this chapter, furthering an explanation of how they operate and attempting to exemplify some of the key terms through various instances in the music video. First, I examine music video’s form, the implications that arise when elements interact with one another and instances in the music video that illustrate those elements. Then I seek to understand music video through a social semiotic lens.

Section I

The Construction of Music Video

When the relationship between image, music and lyrics are considered, music video’s construction and viewer interpretation have virtually endless possibilities which all make the medium a significant part of culture. Andrew Goodwin’s (1992) description of a music video’s “synaesthesia” is a concept relevant to analysis—many non-visual elements are layered to produce a visual iconography in the mind’s eye, translating to the video building upon elements of the song (p. 50). This provides an interesting but elusive framework defining the music video’s exceptionally fluid meanings. The main source of explanation and commentary used in this study is drawn from Carol Vernallis (2004) exploration of music video assembly. Vernallis posits many ways in which music video is its own unique medium, especially in how it separates itself from film. In this section, I apply Vernallis’ suggestions to highlight entry points into

¹¹ Jancsary, Höllerer and Meyer (2016) clarify that critical discourse analyses is more of a “research program” rather than a particular method because it involves various approaches and theoretical models. The social semiotic method integrates critical discourse.

music video analysis as well as techniques that integrate it into this study's social semiotic method and emphasize critical cultural implications.

Vernallis (2004) offers different areas of focus to analyze: narrative, editing, actors, settings, props and costumes, space/color/texture/time, lyrics, musical parameters and the connections among music, image and lyrics. For the purposes of this study, I consider all points but examine some more closely than others. Decisions are based on the elements' abilities to be signified most obviously, allowing for a smoother categorization of social semiotic themes. I also draw on instances in the video for which these are most applicable to illustrate the potentiality of such points. Music video is not only an artistic practice, but also an "ideological apparatus" (Vernallis, 2004, p. x). Vernallis considers individual structures in music video to tie them to social and cultural context. However, additional texts help to expound on that context, such as Railton and Watson's (2011) book that drives into the sexual, race and gendered aspects of music video—the politics of representation, among other texts. The notion of identity politics is a focus of my study, to be illuminated by form. The following section on social semiotics will also aid in investigating similar queries about discourses of power as it asks questions targeted at representative qualities, and for this study, gender and sexuality are most salient.

Structure and Technique

A music video consists of working parts that internalize meaning, on the singular and collective level. To dissect a music video, it makes most sense to first see the music video as a number of structures and closely examine each. Because the social semiotic method works from the micro-level of signifiers, it is helpful to organize analysis by conventional structures in music video and then parse the individual structure by applying it to the specific context. Like the social semiotic method, the combination of elements can then be tied to the broader sociocultural

context, including discourses on power. Here I focus on the structure as well as other techniques that can work alongside structural analysis, highlighting use of narrative, music and lyrics, setting, editing style, actors, props and costumes and space and time.

Narrative. Like most music videos, “Cool Slut” is nonnarrative. In other words, a clear sequence of events with a beginning, middle and end is nonexistent, but is instead “cyclical and episodic” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 3). Vernallis observes that nonnarratives typically do not have developed characters, which is an observation that translates to the illusory characters in “Cool Slut.” The characters portrayed by the band members have only vaguely defined personalities and do not necessarily overcome obstacles that change them like a narrative would entail. The characters are largely static, despite moments of contradiction. Vernallis acutely emphasizes the elusive nature of the nonnarrative form: “At the end of the video, I feel as if I have grasped the video at some fundamental level but cannot articulate who, what, where, when, how or why” (p. 10). In this same way, viewers can grasp the baseline meaning, but articulating it would only come from breaking the video down into bits as I do in this study—even then, polysemy is an overwhelming reality.

The video’s satire clarifies, but also further complicates the video’s meanings. Vernallis (2004) explains that nonnarrative music videos capitalize on two aspects, which are that “each shot possesses its own truth value—a truth that cannot be undermined by another shot’s” and that “each shot has only a vague temporality” (p. 10). These aspects are both realized in “Cool Slut,” culminating to a level of unpredictability—unlike film, music videos in this style do not allow the viewer to anticipate scenes. Narrative serves to ground overall perspectives on the “Cool Slut” music video—that are known but never truly known. A cogent set of interpretations for still

has many possibilities. This determines a central aim in this case study, which is to present intricacies that illustrate viewers as the ultimate arbiters of meaning.

Music and Lyrics. In music video, song is the lens of interpretation, and lyrics can push the narrative along. Although Vernallis (2004) notes that lyrics are never sufficient to complete the fullest sense of communication. Contrary to Vernallis' argument, I assert that the lyrics of "Cool Slut" are exceptionally salient. Here, the lyrics are necessarily combined with the image and music to create feminist satire. The anthem reclaims derogatory terminology and simultaneously questions the choice to act promiscuously. The image is linked to the song in a variety of ways, such as its occasional synchronicity and tendency to hold ambivalence through a contrived girlhood. Without the lyrics, the video's message would be even more unclear, less potent, less meaningful. While a lack of clarity leaves room for negative interpretations on the sexual objectification of women in music videos, the postmodern woman reclaims this to vocalize ambivalence on gender and what the patriarchal society assumes it to mean.

Vernallis (2004) does hold tension with her argument to state that "music-video lyrics frequently make way for material with sharper contours," including the effects of lyrics aligning with the gestures of the actors of the video (p. 137). For example, in the music video, the verse "To all the girls in the world / Trying to take of their shirts / Ladies, it's okay to be / It's okay to be slutty" is playing while Julia Shapiro, the lead singer is struggling to take off her sweatshirt in frame (Chastity Belt, 2015). The calculated alignment of lyrics and image emphasize the act of taking of the shirt, it sharpens contour. Vernallis observes that music video-directors "refuse to locate attention to any one place" and the typical shifting of image in song, which deems lyrics more indistinct (p. 140). But in "Cool Slut," the director allows the image of Shapiro to linger, and many scenes for that matter, to situate the lyrical context. The lyrics have that "semiotic

richness” that Vernallis refers to, and the image does reposition constantly to “match the energy, the emotional intensity” of the song (p. 140). Nevertheless, the viewer is easily able to capture the lyrics, their potential meanings and their connection to the image because the video begs transparency. The trifecta is ironic, as Vernallis points out—multiple elements would seemingly serve to promote clarity, but in music video, there remains variability, unable to escape the strangleholds of Barthes’ notion of constraint among multiple elements (Vernallis, 2004, p. 142, citing Barthes, 1977). Image extrapolates the number of interpretations that the viewer comprehends. But contrary to highly polysemic nature of music video and equivalent to sharpened contours, “music, camera, and lyrics work in tandem to create some of the most striking moments in music video” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 149). By emphasizing moments, they act as a singular rhetorical device.

Sellnow and Sellnow (2001) explore the relationship between music and lyrics and their impact on the listener, arguing that musicians create an “illusion of life” for listeners. Music is an effective rhetorical force because its “rhythmic patterns symbolize the patterns of intensity and release, which are embodied in the forms of human feeling,” persuading the listener to identify (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 397, citing Langer, 1953). To illustrate, the authors give the example of how musicians can combine music with the poetry of the lyrics to “slow or even arrest a story for a period in order to intensify a particular image or mood” (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 398, citing Langer, 1953). However, Vernallis (2004) argues that the emotion that music expresses is still “ill-defined” (p. 142).

Sellnow and Sellnow (2001) describe two lyrical “virtual experiences,” which are created by artists in how they amplify a particular situation. These are the “poetic illusion,” or “backward-looking into the virtual past,” and the “dramatic illusion,” or “forward-looking into

the virtual future” (pp. 399-400). Sellnow and Sellnow (2001) also describe the comedic tragic rhythms, defined by struggle and fulfillment, respectively. The rhetorical utility, they argue, is the interaction of the virtual experience of the lyrics and the “virtual time” of the musical score. On music, Vernallis (2004) explains how music has the capacity for representation and does so tracing the history of arguments about music, citing two central claims. These are that music has its “own language and internal coherence, that music is “only for itself” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 142). More productively and integral to a social semiotic analysis, is the claim that music has the “power to represent social organization through iconic resemblance” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 142). Vernallis illustrates this notion with two opposing examples, one of communal based hip-hop music in which call-and-response is utilized. The other is the Western tendency to emphasize “large-scale structure, novelistic design, and massive physical space, suggestive of a “unified bourgeois subject” (2004, p. 142). These examples aren’t as easily translatable to the alternative rock space, of alternative music’s partiality to cramped space.

Setting. Vernallis (2004) outlines several types of settings. Most pertinent to the “Cool Slut” music video is the mixed space, where actors are “freed from commitment to place,” alluding to a sort of white privilege. In the video, the band members move from outside space to household space, the living room and kitchen, and back and forth again through editing. Mixed space also lends the viewer to “infer a richer subjectivity” of the performers, addressing Aufderheide’s (1986) observation of the subject and its relationship to fixed roles. Nevertheless, the subjectivity is attached to specific girl stereotypes. Each performer—in this case band members who enact individual personas, are placed in specific settings to indicate the “type” of personality each possesses. The significance of setting, of space, works with the gender stereotypes that the band is thought to satirize in the music video. For example, Gretchen Grimm,

Chastity Belt's drummer, is seen at a library dropping of a book, and when she does so, she looks to the camera with a smirk to portray self-gratification, as well as to ignite a gendered spectator.

Editing. The editing of a music video is done in a way to “ensure that no single element (the narrative, the setting, the performance, the star, the lyrics, the song) gains the upper hand” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 27). Opening the space to allow an element to come to the fore would stifle the myriad kinds of relationships to arise. The editing of a video allows “relations between the song and the image,” it turn lending itself to noteworthy qualities, or themes that emerge as they do in “Cool Slut” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 28). The music video's style of editing creates the elusiveness that often pervades music video, a sense of knowing but not knowing what the video is *really* supposed to mean. The editing is “disjunctive,” keeping the viewer within “the ever-changing surface of the song” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 28).

One of the most distinct edits, at least for this study, is the use of camera angles which create the gaze, the gendered spectator. Vernallis (2004) explains the use of low-angle and high-angle shots. Low-angle shots are used most often, reproducing “the relations among audience, performer, and stage” as well as conferring “authority upon performers to assert their sexual charisma, often crudely, by highlighting the erogenous zones of performers” (p. 33). Close-ups are “understood to serve specific structural functions” as well, in how they can create the star and let certain expression linger (Vernallis, 2004, p. 47-48). These edits can coerce the viewer, directing her attention to where it does not necessarily want to go, in which “the use of the human figure can suggest claustrophobia” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 113).

Editing disrupts order and can make a “musical phrase the most significant unit” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 37). Editing provides a narrative that has a “sense of lack,” however, it does allude to a “character's personality, mood, goals, or desire but will never fully disclose them” (p.

37). The editing of “Cool Slut” reveals each band member’s persona over the course of the video, setting them in different places, focusing on certain body movements and expression that might characterize them as primarily sensitive or aloof. The personality is never fully disclosed though—the viewer can only make a rough estimation of what each character represents. Character traits can also be gathered from the way relationships are portrayed through editing, through paired shots. Meanings are not defined, but “surely suggest the animating desire that characters bear towards objects or others” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 41). For example, in the video you have one shot of Gretchen Grimm dancing alone and it jumps to showing the other band members watching excitedly on a living room couch. The viewer can gather that the relationship to Grimm and the others is a positive one, where each band members affirms the rest. This also signals the subtext of queerness.

Actors. Here, I focus on relations between all members in the video. Vernallis (2004) notes that understanding what figures in the video mean to each other, but “Cool Slut” is structured in a way that signals assumption. Julia Shapiro, the lead singer, acts as the star with the video showing more scenes of her, but the other band members have almost equal time on screen. Her character is more obscure than emphasized. The dynamic is mostly egalitarian. Vernallis looks to how character types are created in music video through “facial expression, posture, and clothing” and music helps decipher the more nuanced meanings of the character type (p. 60). In “Cool Slut” character types are heavily drawn to add a satirical effect. Each band member provokes a stereotypical feminine behavior. Vernallis observes a growing phenomenon, which is not as present in this video, so it could potentially be an anomaly. Her observation is that “the star” is becoming more “limited and codified rather than varied” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 63). Maybe this is the appeal of the “Cool Slut” video—the video is not as over-produced as

compared to a pop song's video. The video is more creative than that, which could be an allusion of a factually large label, albeit the "sister" of Sub Pop. In this video, the star *is* a smaller, supplemental element, whose presence work in close collaboration with the other elements.

Examining actors requires looking at their subjectivities. Aufderheide (1986) argues that the "lack of a clear subject carries into its constant play with the outward trappings of sex roles" (p. 69). In other words, the ill-defined subject, or ill-defined subjects, has the potential to reify predetermined gender roles. But the roles that band members fill through the lack of clarity in the song and in the video is less to entrap them. The "play" is the device through which meanings become intelligible. It is *because* members' personas are not well-defined in the video's fantasy that the satirical usage becomes explicit. The question of whether a coherent subject is possible in a music video rises, given music video's highly multimodal nature. Roberts' (1991) argues that "feminist music videos illuminate the ways in which female performers use the music video to reveal the contradictory nature of gender definition in Western culture" (p. 2). In her article about women in hip-hop music videos, Perry (2003) writes that the creativity of sexual explicitness can be liberatory for women because "it may expand the confines of what women are allowed to say and do" (p. 141).

Props and Costumes. Possibly most available to a social semiotic reading are the objects of the video, which have "culturally predetermined meaning, value, and uses" (Vernallis, 2004, p. 99). Objects are loaded with signification, joined by the previous discussion of relationships among the elements and actors. Vernallis (2004) notes that the material used in the music video and be broken down into smaller units, such as its material and its comparison to the rest of the set (p. 101). Performers' clothing can separate performer and viewer, as the "Cool Slut" music video does, which ties into the important time element integral to music video analysis. The

video was made in 2015, yet the clothing that performers wear is from a different time, early '90s—an observation that translates into dated floral furniture of upholstery. She notes that music, costumes and dance are “intimately bound,” as seen in the video, where the performers wear the dated clothing and dance awkwardly, signifying their young age or representing the era existing before sex-positive feminism. Vernallis also describes how cloth and bodies allow the viewer to make connections between it and other elements, to be carried along, to be set up to consistently question signification over and over. Vernallis states that clothing signifies social functions, which can be broken by devices that undercut the signification.

Space and Time. The video's use of space is in important to defining the viewer's position. Vernallis (2004) notes an inside/outside phenomenon that “extends beyond that of concrete physical boundaries,” meaning that the viewer can place herself in the video's different constructed situations (p. 111). Similarly, Aufderheide (1986) comments on the video's capacity to captivate the viewer: “One of music video's distinctive features as a social expression is its open-ended quality, aiming to engulf the viewer in its communication with itself, its fashioning of an alternative world where image is reality” (p. 57-58). More pragmatically, viewers must be immersed in narrative in a matter of minutes, which constitutes the need to be included somehow. Another captivating aspect of music video is how viewers are drawn in by performers' bodies, how viewers move “over the surface of bodies, as well as over the landscape of music,” asking the viewer to loosen “sexual inhibitions and allegiance to particular a gender identity” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 116). Losing the self to construct a new self is part of the video's imagination, working through close quarters and rushed sense of time.

Other Ways into Analysis. Vernallis (2004) suggests specific techniques to analyze music video, to parse the complexity of the music video and its many working parts that can all be

pieces of analysis. She notes that the statement of a music video is “located in the relation of all its parts as it plays out in time—in a play between both the visual and musical codes” (2004, p. 199). Aside from visuals and music, she notes that music video is an expression of relations between the video maker, band and location, which takes into consideration of authorship and its influence. However, the credence of auteur theory is not only unapplicable to music video analysis, but the theory is waning in film studies. As Roberts (1991) notes in her article on female rap videos, the text as well as the director must be redefined, who is no longer “the purportedly male director only” (p. 143). The performer must also be considered the director, one who “interweaves and juxtaposes meanings through her delivery, her look her gestures, and in many cases the music and lyrics” (p. 143). Roberts argument hinges on poststructuralist theory to evaluate the star-centered music video convention that empowers the performer as an equal participant in producing the final product, rather than simply a “puppet of the director” (p. 143). Robert tends to the need to redefine “text” to expand the definition, which includes “a multitude of nonverbal signs and freeing it from monologic and auteurist assumptions” (p. 143). Everything inside of a music video is up for debate, becoming “signs liable to interpretation,” such as the “performer’s dress, gestures, enunciation, and style” (p. 143).

Vernallis (2004) offers other modes of analysis, such as commutation—“to take an object and imagine changing one of its cultural parameters, such as race, class, gender, sexuality” (p. 202). She also suggests that one should tend to moments of disjunction or contradiction, and within Chastity Belt’s creative work this is prevalent. For example, one scene the band members are drinking wine and eating snack packs, producing conflicting ages. Another example of disjunction is a particular musical practice, “while the image reflects a style from another era,” emphasizing time as construct and making it more ambiguous (Vernallis, 2004, p. 205). The last

mode relevant to “Cool Slut” that I consider is the exploration of psychoanalytic and sociological models, like hegemony, which prove salient to feminist and queer theory in topic of gaze. In the video, one could argue that band members are staking their claim with feminism, making jokes about their femininity before their femininity becomes the pit of the joke.

Critical Cultural Analysis

As Railton and Watson (2011) note, music video is site for “where normative constructions of race, gender and ethnicity are put on display, confirmed, reinforced and, sometimes, challenged” (p.11). She also notes how music video presents viewers with a “range of ways of being in the world” (Railton & Watson, 2011, p. 11). This notion translates into music video as a fruitful site of pedagogy, like in Jennifer Hurley’s (1994) autoethnographic piece on music videos in the classroom. Hurley uses the concept of “gendered subjectivity” to delineate those subjects that are built from a network of social relations and that gender ideologies vital to that construction (Hurley, 1994, citing Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). To build her argument about music videos, Hurley draws on Haug’s research on memory-work, which posits that women see themselves as external (citing Haug, 1987). She concludes to say that knowledge or meaning “relating to femininity, masculinity, attractiveness, coolness, toughness, sex appeal, the latest music, and even a historical sense of the tradition of rock and pop music can all be learned about via music videos” (p. 333). Like Hurley, Railton and Watson (2011) discuss the discursive subject in her work on gender in music video and how cultural representations lend themselves to identity formations, but more importantly, how they can be “key sites for political analysis and intervention” (p. 19).

Railton and Watson (2011) discuss feminist academic work on music video, which distinguishes between the “negative” and the “positive” depictions of women, the former where

music videos are sexually exploitative or the latter to be music videos that show women as role models, who are culturally distinctive or where male privilege is visually appropriated. However, from a poststructuralist perspective, Railton and Watson astutely recognize that the representation is not an either/or game, but rather, the meanings gathered from a music video's image of women are countless—"there are multiple identity positions which are possible within the overarching categories of femininity and womanhood" (p. 20). The binary of good and bad certainly does not translate in Chastity Belt's music video—satire brings about complication. The performers are both "sexually exploited" but playfully so. This could be interpreted as a visual appropriation, but regardless, the binary is inevitably destabilized. Vernallis (2004) described how the identity of performers in music video is more elusive, but certainly, the performers can be perceived to be with agency. Railton and Watson describe postfeminism at length to usher in the concept of self as project, which is not *only* pressed by regimes of power.

Railton and Watson (2011) adhere to Foucault's concept "technology of self" to claim that the meaning of feminism is always being negotiated. When viewers watch "Cool Slut" they can interpret infinite meanings from many different feminist positions. The notion of multiple subjectivities points to one idea that the authors posit, which is to:

consider the relationship between music video and cultural identity not simply as a straight unbroken line – as a litany of imposed subjectivities – but rather as a dialogic encounter between different identity positions which may variously be regressive or transformative, reactionary or progressive, nostalgic or yearning, and, of course, accepted or rejected. (p. 88)

Railton and Watson note that music videos can be characterized by paradox, a site of production in how paradox "can point towards new questions, new ways of thinking, and in certain cases,

new answer to new questions” (p. 33). The “Cool Slut” music video is paradoxical because I am not able to definitively determine what side they are choosing, maybe because they are holding many feminist positions at once. Aside from the contradictory characteristics of identity within the video, the formal structure of music video is “based on a paradox” (Berland, 1993, p. 2020). Berland (1993) provides this insight after observing that “music video draws our attention simultaneously to the song and away from it, positing itself in the place of what it represents” (p. 20). The video image does not always directly align with image—it does not most of the time. In “Cool Slut,” the image has the upper hand in many cases throughout the video, where there is a lot of action, a lot of humor, a lot of colors.

Questions involved in the industry, its influence over the creative domain and its impact on the authenticity communicated through aesthetics will be detailed in Chapter VI. However, as part of a music video’s critical discourse, I want to briefly mention these ideas here. Railton and Watson (2011) discuss music videos in terms of the style, which illuminates music videos as promotional tools performing a “function of legitimization and authentication” (p. 62). Vernallis (2004) outlines this idea as well to say that “the video must sell the song; it therefore responsible to the song in the eyes of the artist and record company” (p. x). The promotional aspect of music videos is an important point to weight in, as music videos are a postmodern art that can be characterized by the “merging of commercial and artistic image production” (Aufderheide, 1986, p. 58). In Railton and Watson’s example of Arctic Monkeys, who purportedly found success rather quickly by internet and fan-work, they discuss two music video releases that take on different styles, but both serve to authenticate Arctic Monkeys as a “serious indie-rock band.” Railton and Watson allude to the hypocrisy of the rock world prizing the notion of ‘not selling

out,’ yet the rock world still attempts to appeal to the masses, which inevitably influences creative decision-making.

Integral to critical cultural analysis is the political economy of cultural forms, which Goodwin (1992) advocates to prioritize in music video analysis. He postulates that a postmodern analysis has often lacked investigating cultural forms at depth, that it is largely ahistorical, “blind to the ways in which the televisual vehicle has changed,” and that a connection between issues and social power is often lacking because of “textual avant-gardism” (p.157). Goodwin argues that in the postmodern era, political analysis has opened the door to less pessimistic and reductionist approaches, such “relative autonomy, audience resistance, multiplicity of meaning, and a politics of pleasure” (p. 157). However, he notes that an ideological critique is missing, ideology being something that works to “establish and sustain relations of power,” and that this should be a priority (Goodwin, 1992, p. 158, citing Thompson, 1990). Moreover, Goodwin suggests that production practices and professional ideologies be investigated into a more thorough political economy analysis of music video, a line of inquiry to be revisited later in the thesis.

One example of ideological critique that Goodwin (1992) includes is one that examines parody and pastiche, techniques to my site of analysis. He notes that parody and pastiche “must allow for a range of interpretations” but adds tension with the observation of pop images’ “attempt to construct a mass market by playing upon confusions about critical distance, so as to generate two images that can be read both innocently and self-consciously” (p. 165). When placing the concept of pastiche firmly between production and consumption practices, intentions become more apparent (Goodwin, 1992). Chastity Belt’s video plays upon this confusion through parody of feminine stereotypes, allowing for many interpretations, so Goodwin suggests,

it is important to note the implications that this has socially and politically. The dialectic that mediates two opposing ends, imposed power and subjectivity, is a significant facet of political economy analyses.

Music video has a remarkable presence in popular culture, one that is worth analyzing. I first look at prominent formal structures to gather potential meanings to notice the larger social and cultural meanings of the music video's structure. Doing so helps me to answer questions about ideological messages conveyed. Parsing structural components allows for perspectives on how ideology is manifested. Examining structure grants me access to answer what absences mean, what identity positions are being manifested and what impacts do industry norms and rituals have on all of this. Vernallis' (2004) description of various music video components helps to maintain the social semiotic framework that I apply to the "Cool Slut" music video.

Section II

Defining Social Semiotics as Method

To facilitate a systematic investigation of "Cool Slut" alongside suggestions on music video analyses, I utilize a social semiotic method that values the details and how they influence and are influenced by culture. Different from structural semiotics concerned with isolated elements, social semiotics acknowledges the need to examine the social context. Kaja Silverman (1983) explains this turn for the isolated signified to the signifier and the symbolic world. She cites Michael Foucault, who challenges the "formalist tenet" and "insists on the relational status of every signifying instance" (p. 42). Social semiotics takes heed of "semiotic resources," different from "signs" in structural semiotics, which imply that there is a concrete, unshakeable, predetermined connotation. On the other hand, a "resource" allows for change depending on its use, having a "theoretical semiotic potential" and an "actual semiotic potential" dependent on

social context (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 4). Examining the semiotic sources entails asking, “what are the available choices of such resources and what kinds of meanings can these be used to produce” (Ledin & Machin, 2018). Social semiotics integrates critical discourse analysis, which points to the need to unveil the increasingly affective and functional multimodality¹² of semiotic materials, related to a growth in economic, political and institutional objectives that are associated with marketization (Ledin & Machin, 2018, citing Fairclough, 1992). This notion proves true in Chastity Belt’s music video, whose intention aligns with feminist politics. The bright texts on screen and the song’s lyrics pair with the visual devices to produce a more potent, but more ambivalent message versus the meaning potentials gathered from the song alone.

Using the Social Semiotic Approach

Signs are much more complex than content and expression. Rather, they involve expression reliant on materiality/environment or human manufacture as well as consciousness; these are dependent on meanings produced from various relationships (Ledin & Machin, 2018, citing Hjelmslev, 1961). Social semiotics takes heed of “semiotic resources” where the “meaning potential” of semiotic resources is explored, which can be defined by what could be produced through “particular instances of use” (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Rather than attempting to observe a common theme among texts, social semiotics requires that meanings must be “activated by producers and viewers of images” (Leeuwen & Oyama, 2004). Meaning potential points to the dynamic characteristics of audience interpretation that manifest differently in different contexts. Van Leeuwen (2005) distinguishes meaning potential from “affordance” by noting that meaning

¹² The combination of language and visuals to produce meaning potential, which further complicates the process of constructing meaning.

potentials imply that the meanings have already been introduced into society. Affordances are “waiting to be discovered” (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 5).

Ledin and Machin (2018) argue that researchers must grasp how semiotic materials accomplish different communicative acts, which helps illuminate the possibility of uses. Part of this task is examining the affordances that semiotic materials have, or the “ideas and assumptions that shape communication and social behavior” (Ledin & Machin, 2018). Through semiotic materials, we “interact with, experience and understand the world,” that are not only physical but are *designed* to make meaning (Ledin & Machin, 2018, citing Voloshinov, 1973). In other words, different materials fulfill particular communicative objectives and serve the interest of particular individuals or groups. Chastity Belt uses semiotic materials within the video, where song and imagery coincide with one another, attempting to design a clearer feminist satirical message instead of remaining at the level of song or writing a blog post on their Instagram, for example. These semiotic materials, such as the video’s grainy texture or the community built through shots of band members laughing and dancing with one another, are variant in meaning.

The method also asks, “what are the available choices of such resources and what kinds of meanings can these be used to produce” (Ledin and Machin, 2018). Social semiotics considers fonts, colors, uses of borders, texture of packaging, etc., which communicate specific ideas. A social semiotic approach aims to understand the choices available to the designer, or in this case, the director/other creative members in the music video project and what those choices can express. The relationships between elements are integral to social semiotics study because new meanings can come from those connections. Here, I call on the semiotic resource of the ‘90s style font used to label each band member and their outfits that affords the viewer an older temporal space than the contemporary. The supposed setting could point to differing ideas

surrounding sex in society among older and younger generations of women. Ledin and Machin (2018) also note that choices are related to established codes brought on by societal regulation that lay in the hands of those with power. While Chastity Belt may be subverting the status quo, its subversion can only happen by using semiotic resources already constructed by a reigning group of people within society who define the norms, or *gender* norms. Furthermore, the social conditions that allow them to perform a more controversial and possibly expensive task grants a new line of inquiry.

Multimodality. The predecessor of multimodality is rooted in social semiotic approach to visual communication developed by Hodge and Kress, which defines modality as the term that describes “the stance of participants towards the state and the status of the system of classification of the mimetic plan” (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 122). In other words, modality examines how the interpreter views the form in question, that which can be represented as real. Hodge and Kress (1988) problematize what is “true” or real through the concept of reality and imply the “social construction or contestation of knowledge-systems” (p. 123). Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) text *Reading Images* revolutionized the way visual communication is seen through the characteristic of “multimodality,” or the combination of language and visuals to produce meaning potential, which further complicates the process of constructing meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen analyze the multimodality of texts to look at the ways in which modes integrate and interact with one another, rather than viewing them as a composite. Breaking images down by its parts provides a more critical lens. Multimodality has only grown more functional and affective, lending to a greater need to think critically. Norman Fairclough (1995) connected this enmeshed form of communication to commodification and marketization.

Fairclough explains critical analysis and emphasizes the need that this form of analysis is important because of its place in creating social and cultural change.

Subjectivity in Social Semiotics. Kaja Silverman (1983) writes at length about the development of subjectivity in semiotics, which lends itself to my method because the gendered agency of performer and viewer is one of my study's focuses. Silverman notes that language, discourse and subjectivity are "theoretically inseparable" (citing Benveniste, 1971). The "I" is not only the person speaking, but it is the discourse to which the "I" refers and exists within (Silverman, 1984, citing Benveniste, 1971). Film theorists have appropriated Benveniste's conception of the "speaking subject" and "the subject of speech" to examine the "level of enunciation," or the production techniques like camera movement and editing, and the "level of fiction," or narrative "which the spectator of the finished film is encouraged to find him or herself, and the characters with whom he or she is encouraged to identify" (Silverman, 1983, p. 47). I extend this to music video to look at its formal structures I have previously discussed. In doing so, I interrogate the ways in which viewers utilize the speaking subject, or "the agency responsible for the text's enunciation" and "subjects of speech" as well as the characters central to the video in how they interact with spectator. As Silverman suggests, character representations "confer subjectivity upon the viewer" and this is what produces the new category that Benveniste's model does not contain: "the spoken subject," i.e., the viewer. (p. 47).

The viewer's subjectivity is activated by the music video, constituted by the music video, and the viewer's subjectivity is not stable or continuous. However, the dominant values that are communicated by the text allows an illusion of stability and continuity by the way it "speaks the viewer's subjectivity in familiar ways" (Silverman, 1983, p. 71). The subject of speech and the spoken subject are distinct but are closely linked in that the text constitutes the subject

(Silverman, 1983). Althusser extended this dynamic to include a “cultural agent, i.e., a person or textual construct that relays ideological information” (Silverman, 1983, p. 71, citing Althusser, 1969). The “Cool Slut” music video is that cultural agent, the textual construct that communicates ideology. The way in which subject is constituted through discourse culminates to the dissolution of the individual, who is always historically determined; it gestures to “human reality as a construction, the product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious” (Silverman, 1983, p. 130). The subject-discourse organization means that “human existence cannot escape the “symbolic world,” or the exteriority of the subject (Silverman, 1983, p. 130). Silverman’s thesis is most concerned with the subject’s “interior” which Silverman asserts as having the need to be grasped with its relation to the symbolic world. She arrives at her estimations through exploring a Freudian/Lacanian framework. I will highlight the most relevant aspects of her discussion.

Silverman (1983) underscores that the division of the sexes is intensely culturally mediated, an event retrospectively experienced by male and female” (p. 140). This opens a discussion of male’s cultural privileges embedded in patriarchal culture and the female’s realization of those which leads to a sense of “lack.” Anatomy becomes confused with destiny, resulting in biological determinist, which has an ideological, oppressive function (Silverman, 1983). All goes back to the subject defined by her being and the phenomenal world. The subject enters the symbolic world and thus is reduced to the signifier of discourse, where her “unconscious is the discourse of the Other,” and “its desire are those of an already constituted social order” (Silverman, 1983, p. 166). Silverman discusses “suture” in all its relevance to the subject and does so in the context of cinema, which can once again be easily extended to music video. Calling on a Freudian framework is especially useful to examining the suture in film,

which Silverman describes as the “process whereby the inadequacy of the subject’s position is exposed...” (p. 232). The viewer is deemed passive through a “cinematic sleight-of-hand,” which Silverman describes as attributing characteristics to the fictional character through “machinery of enunciation: the ability to generate narrative, the omnipotent and coercive gaze, the castrating authority of the law” (1983, p. 232). Suture is pertinent to the video in the ways of its reliance on gaze to evoke the gendered spectator, both men and women.

Semiotic Resources in Musical Images. Social semiotics can be applied to music, of which subjectivity is a central focus. Like Sellnow and Sellnow’s (2001) article on the “illusion of life” created by music, David Machin’s (2011) case study of Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean” enables a social semiotic approach to examine how the semiotic features of the music and lyrics combine to “communicate and reveal something of the subjectivity, the emotional world, created by musicians” (p. 152). Machin outlines two social semiotic meanings of sounds—provenance, “when a sound comes to have a particular meaning through cultural accumulation of associations, and experiential meaning potential, which is derived from “associations with things in the real world,” both of which are considered in this study (pp. 154-155). A second example of a social semiotic approach to music is Moodley’s (2020) analysis of female adolescent sexuality in Liz Phair’s “Glory, in which he draws on the semiotic resources of the songs sound and lyrics. Through these resources, Moodley concludes that the song molds the subjectivity of the song’s subject, an adolescent girl, fraught with the tensions regarding her sexual pleasure. Moodley’s article does not only provide a model study, but the content is especially relevant to “Cool Slut,” a song that voices similar tensions.

In his book *Analysing popular music: Image, sound, text*, Machin (2010) applies the social semiotic approach to music in detail, examining social semiotics in many musical

locations that are useful to this study. Here, I highlight his discussions on album cover iconography, visual composition of typeface and color and lyric analysis. While my primary focus is the music video, the connection between the song's album and affiliated cover is an important relationship. The cover of *Time to Go Home*, has a peculiar image that communicates a specific meaning relevant to the music video's contested meanings. Visual elements build, and together they "communicate certain discourses, values, identities" (Machin, 2010). For instance, one should consider the style of the album cover, e.g., photographic or cartoonist, and/or typefaces and do so in a way that realizes "choices available to designers, seeing them as lists of meaning potentials" (Machin, 2010). Salient images are noted, which are the parts that are the "most important carriers of meaning" (Machin, 2010). In album covers, Machin examines the elements of pose, gaze, social distance, objects and settings. These can be broken into smaller bits to examine elements like any potent cultural symbols, size, color, tone, focus, foregrounding, overlapping. Machin also looks to "modality," or how close the image is to real representation. He further defines color and typeface to outline their ability to represent ideas, function interpersonally, or "convey moods and attitude," and to create coherence.

Machin (2010) discussion of lyrics include an examination of its values, participants and their agency. Critical discourse analysis comes into play in looking at participants—what "social actors are included, excluded or made invisible" as well as how individualized they are by the amount of personal information disclosed (Machin, 2010). Analyzing participants further illuminates lyric communication. Useful descriptions can be given to participants such as: personalized/impersonalized, individualized/collectivized, nominalized, functionalization, anonymous, aggregated and objectivated (Machin, 2010, citing Van Leeuwen, 1996). The agency of participants in lyrics can be described as: material, behavioral, mental, verbal,

relational and existential (Machin, 2010, citing Halliday, 1978). Machin argues that settings and circumstances should also be noted and that these can be tied to music genre.

Machin points out that “metaphorical association” is an analytical method in visual communication; metaphorical association is defined by the way “visual elements can have meaning through the way in which they resemble things, or certain qualities of things in the real world” (Machin, 2010). With these tools in mind, one explores the denotations and connotations of meaning, and when images are abstract, the connotation of an image becomes more overt. However, the prominence of either depends on the context. Machin also notes that although images can involve a level of free association, designers use “established connotators” to communicate in a way that lends to a viewer’s clear understanding—an important reality to recognize.

Critical Discourse

Critical discourse analysis is an approach developed by Fairclough and others (Ledin & Machin, 2018, citing Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Van Dijk, 1985). This form of analysis draws from Michel Foucault’s work on “discourses” and Marxist critique, examining establishments that serve specific power interests (Ledin & Machin, 2018). While critical discourse focuses on language, Fairclough’s ideas pertain to visual imagery as it is its own language. Fairclough (1995) highlights the notion of the word “critical” because it recognizes the prevalence of ambiguous connections between semiotic activity and power. The term “critical” also pertains to questions of “how things are, why they are like that, and how they could be different” (Jancsary, Höllerer & Meyer, 2016, p. 5). This notion of ambiguity relates to the interplay of different semiotic forms, or multimodality and its ubiquity in modern society. Sometimes discourse is straightforward, but “many texts are not so simple” as they involve a “complicated mixture of

different discourse types”; discourse is made more complicated by the different elements that language constitutes—social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge (Fairclough, 1995, p. 55). Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that language use, or media text more generally like a music video, for instance, is a social practice in that it is a “mode of action” but also a “socially and historically situated mode of action, in a dialectical relationship with other facets of the social” (p. 54). Fairclough (1995) explains “dialectical relationship,” which is defined by language use being “socially shaped” *and* “socially constituted”—critical discourse analyses explore the tension between the two, and this is my aim in unpacking the music video.

Fairclough (1995) provides a framework for how to execute a critical discourse analysis, which helps to elucidate the insidious innerworkings of power structures. Here, it is worth mentioning Barthes, who alludes to ideology and hegemony through his explanation of connotation, noting that connotation is “the operation of an ideology”—a “false consciousness”—that serves to justify the dominant positions of an historical period (Silverman, 1983, p.30, citing Barthes, 1972). Silverman (1983) problematizes Barthes notion of penetrable ideological form, “a reality outside of ideology,” to say that ideology will always exist within culture—where we create our subjectivity (pp. 30-31). However, Silverman writes that is still worth noting that there are always “a heterogeneity of conflicting ideologies concealed behind a dominant one” and that “it is possible to effect a rupture” in an ideology (p. 31). Hodge and Kress (1988) discuss the way in which style is ideology emerges from “the relationships between groups in a broader social formation,” where groups “declare specific version of social relations,” or define group membership, from which ideology stems (p. 79). Metasigns, or the style of group relations, are messages that “continually refer to and monitor the social relations of semiotic participants” (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 79). Gender is an exceptionally relevant

metasign of this study in that members of Chastity Belt communicate gendered relationships, constituting an its own membership logic.

Although Fairclough (1995) focuses on the linguistics of media texts, he does state that analysis can be applied to the visual as well. This leap has been realized through a plethora of critical discourse analyses of visual communication. To analyze discourse, Fairclough (1995) suggests a two-prong approach, which calls on the “communication event” and the “order of discourse.” A communicative event is comprised of three dimensions—text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. Fairclough states that text can be written or oral, noting that oral can be text like radio or television. I shall extend this to music video. He defines “discourse practice” to be text production and text consumption and “sociocultural practice” to be the “social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is part of” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 57). To contextualize these terms within music video, discourse practices are the process that the director and performers engage in to produce the music video, which would concern form, as well as the consumption practices from the eye of the viewer.

Fairclough (1995) notes that discourse practices can also take on an institutional character, which might include industrial practices of popular music and music video. On the level of discourse practice, researchers determine whether the practice is more conventional/normative or creative. For example, I ask the question of how typical the style and content of the video is in comparison to the text production of music videos overall. To help determine this, the analyst surveys “how the communicative event draws on the order of discourse and what effect it has upon the order of discourse—whether it helps reproduce its boundaries and relationship, or helps restructure them” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 60). The level of analyzing sociocultural practice can be performed on several levels, such as the “more immediate

situational context, the wider context of institutional practices the event is embedded within or the yet wider frame of the society and the culture” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 62).

The second prong, the order of discourse, refers to how the text is structured “in terms of configuration of genres and discourses, and shifts within the order of discourse and in its relationship to socially adjacent orders of discourse” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 63). In other words, how are communication events chained together, which is comprised of “choice relations” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 65). Choices of meaning involves questions of “how to relate to whoever the text is directed at, what identities to project,” but this does not mean that these are free choice, Fairclough emphasizes—they are driven by social determinants (Fairclough, 1995, p. 18). The social conditions of those involved are a component as well as what, or who, is absent, the “choices not made” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 18). For example, I intend to discuss the lack of diversity on screen and off, including ‘independent labels’ more generally. Absence could also relate to the choice of avoiding over-produced effects. Chastity Belt’s video has a certain aesthetic, which has various meaning potentials. One meaning of the video’s low-quality texture communicates DIY values and ethics, which contrasts the style of music videos from more popular artists. However, the band did not produce this video without the help of their label—Hardly Art, a sister label of the larger, very much commercial, Sub Pop records. The DIY style operates as a guise of authenticity. This notion relates to a semiotic resource’s ability to lie due to its symbolic nature (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004).

Conclusion

While I have outlined the working parts in music video and analytical techniques, I include a social semiotic layer to note the communicated ideas, moods and coherence. The social semiotic method with insights from literature on critical discourse analysis work together to

reveal the connections between narrow and wider levels of inquiry. Machin (2011) defines the social semiotic approach to express that it refuses the destination of surface level value and drives at the underpinnings of ideological forms in how it looks at “the resources available to communicators” and how they are “used in specific cases, in particular combinations, to communicate particular meanings” (p. 153). As Susan McClary (1991) notes, music has meaning insofar as the communities that invest in it, “always dependent on the conferring of social meaning” (p. 21). Social meaning derived from music communities, or the viewers that participate in textual production, are invariable to this analysis. The social semiotic method is an effective path into analyzing the “Cool Slut” music video based on signs that are loaded with meaning and its concern for conceptions of subjectivity and gender, both of which are inextricably bound to societal power structures, and the intra-group relationships that contain them.

CHAPTER IV

EMERGENT THEMES

Music video is a complex space where forms, forms within forms and relationships between forms signify meaning. The “Cool Slut” music video is no different, potentially posing a more complicated narrative than other pieces that have a smoother flow. In this video, grasping a finite narrative is a nil effort when different camera angles send a variety of messages and when stereotypes that can only be defined by the viewer and their cultural knowledge. But the cacophony of messages that work together to create a satirical lens through which actors¹³ and viewers work through makes this a rich site of inquiry for a critical cultural analysis. In this section, I explore emergent themes that are rooted in sign making¹⁴ that I find to be the most salient. Themes are not a consequence of singular semiotic resources. Rather, they are a result of many that come together into a fold. Overlap is also an inevitability among them. The following is contingent on the formal structures I have highlighted from Vernallis’ (2004) text, which are loosely analyzed through the social semiotic approach I have described. Screenshots of the music video and other visual resources provide examples of the formal structures. By utilizing Fairclough’s (1995) critical discourse approach to media, social and cultural discourses can be observed as surrounding the video’s content that further illuminate meanings.

¹³ By actors, I refer to the band members in the video, who “act” in an exaggerated, unrealistic, sometimes goofy fashion to get their point across. I use the term “actors,” “characters” and “band members” interchangeably throughout the study.

¹⁴ Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) distinguish “sign making” in social semiotics from signs in semiology, which considers signs as separate from context. The term “sign-making” implies that the signifier and signified are independent variables until brought together by the sign-maker into a new sign.

Temporality, or the historical period of when the video is situated, is discussed first. Several elements are derived from the '90s era: the video quality and editing techniques, costumes and props and allusions to '90s sitcoms. The second theme I explore is what I consider to be a contrived girlhood reminiscent of appropriative strategies in the '90s Riot Grrrl movement, although materialized differently. Girlhood is exhibited through clothing and character behaviors, props and notions of community and solidarity. I then look at meanings that emerge from juxtaposition of image and song, the ways that gender is performed through stereotypes and lastly, exclusionary aspects to the video that relay a particular brand of feminism. It is important to note that the video's emergent themes and the elements that constitute them overlap in many ways. No theme is isolated because all its elements operate in countless ways. The compositional elements are closely intertwined, but utilizing a thematic scheme allows me to elucidate the ambiguities and capture the video's ephemeral qualities.

Temporality

In his book *Popular Music Theory*, Negus (1996) argues that "music is actively made through dialogues with the past" (p. 160). Many forms contribute to historic era being the most prominent theme that surfaces in the "Cool Slut" music video, illustrated through elements such as the retro video quality, editing, costumes, props and allusions to 90s sitcoms. The notions of girl empowerment, a movement popularized in the same decade by all-female music groups, add to the prominence of the video's setting. In her semiotic analysis of the magazine *Jackie*, McRobbie (2000) notes that history is more than novelty; history is a device that allows social values to exist while they are less palatable and more difficult to deal with in the present, demonstrating the "intransigence of much-hallowed social values, and 'natural resistance to change'" (p. 88). It could be argued that the creative team set the video in the '90s because of an

idealization of that period, when the social fabric was noticeably changing, a time when women empowered themselves on a new level. The setting grounds a particular rendering of feminism that does not carry over into the contemporary space. As Vernallis (2004) notes, the alternative genre often concerns itself with the past.

Retro Video Quality and Editing. The video is grainy, hinting at the lower quality resolution of the '80s and '90s. The aesthetics concern themselves with promoting a mood (Luna, 2017). In this video, the lo-fi texture evokes a nostalgic tone. The texture also signifies a do-it-yourself ethic, creating associations with alternative culture.¹⁵ Bright pink text reminiscent of the same time period is used to name the band members as they enter the scene. Moreover, campy transitions are used between some of the shots, such as ripple and timer effects. These effects separate the viewer from the narrative, despite not being fully disjunctive. Although the viewer's position is not in the '90s, she may be pushed to pick up positive cultural critiques of the '90s. Vernallis (2004) argues that "muted colors and raw video quality simply reaffirm our cultural associations with the music," and can link to alternative culture, "prompting questions about its historical links" (p. 166). The retro aesthetic allows the actors to critique culture by signaling an earlier time in media. As Luna (2017) argues, "every cultural product is in a way making synthesis of the past and the current time and mediating in the conflict of past and present" (p. 17).

¹⁵ See Spencer (2008) for a history on Do-It-Yourself ethics and lo-fi culture. In her book, Spencer explores the politics behind music production outside of the mainstream.

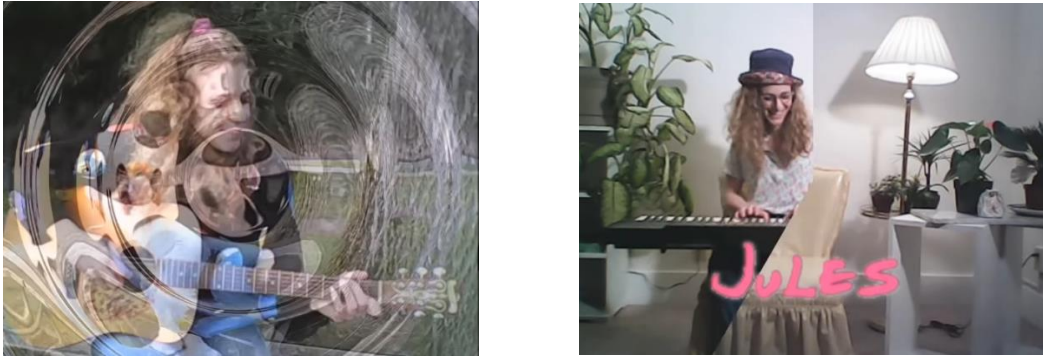


Figure 4.1. On editing, the first image shows the ripple transition. The second image shows the timer transition as well the pink text indicating the lead vocalist, Julia Shapiro.

Mediation between past and present, realized in the retro aesthetic, is seen as a marketing strategy by some. Vernallis (2004) is most concern with cultural resonance of music video, but she does infer that music video is a promotional product on behalf of the song. Similarly, Aufderheide (1986) tends to the need to single out the enmeshed commercial and artistic qualities of music video indicative of the postmodern period. Another aspect of postmodernism is its claim that nothing is original, that everything has been done before; because of the perspective, postmodernist works are characterized with “nostalgic inclinations, historical bricolage, a marked loss of faith in progressivist ideologies” (Brown, 2011, p. 12). Postmodernism is concerned with preserving the past, and the music video preserves the past, in part, as a marketing strategy and appealing to target audience.

Fashioning the '90s: Costumes and Props. The costumes and hairstyles worn by the band members affirm the '90s era. Clothing is the most affirming characteristic of the earlier era. Whether or not the clothes are “mom clothes” or more suited for young girls at that time is debatable. Band members consistently wear vibrant, colorful, funky-patterned '90s-style loose-fitted sweaters and jackets. Solid-colored cotton collared shirts. Jeans are high-waisted with a

mostly light wash, cuffed and paired with Converse sneakers and boots. Hair styles are half ponytails held in by a thick scrunchie, pig tails and braids. Bucket hats appear. Long floral dresses. Shorter skirts with panty-hose underneath. Sunglasses and prescription glasses have same-styled frames. Fashion in the video is obviously dated, but it does not mean that conservative wear did not exist in the '90s. The selection in more exciting clothing could indicate a personality-type and/or age.



Figure 4.2. The first image is the first group dance number, which quickly fades into the second image. Umbrellas have a '90s aesthetic of patterns and bold colors that coincide with costumes. Costumes are recognized in previous scenes, but because the band members are standing against a muted backdrop, the viewer is drawn to them more.

The props communicate an older era as well, such as the umbrellas used in the first group dance scene. The band members are brought back together through only a handful of locations: by the brick wall for dance numbers, the field where they walk side by side and the living room, which allows a collection of dated objects to be exhibited. In a *Better Homes & Gardens* article titled "If you grew up in the '90s, this will take you back to your childhood home," Chilton (2018) lists home décor of the '90s era, some of which reflect the same styles found in the video. She points highlights "pattern x1,000,000" and illustrates her point with pictures of floral and striped couches and pleated lamps. In the video, the living room scenes show furniture not of this

time, like the couch with a striking floral pattern. The solitary chair that is used through the video is white and skirted and behind it sits a pleated white lamp.

Sitcom Allusions. The campiness of the music video can be compared to the aesthetics from sitcoms from the same depicted era. The video has many elements that are used in the television show *Blossom*, for example, a show regularly referenced in popular culture, like in *The Simpsons* and *Seinfeld*. *Blossom* stars Mayim Bialik as Blossom, a smart, quirky teen, who navigates teenage life in the show. The show tackles serious issues, like adolescent benchmarks, e.g., menstruation, sexual/physical abuse, alcohol/drugs, divorce, etc., but maintains a level of casualness and comic relief. Many tropes are seen in the show (tvtropes.org). The dancing theme trope, as described in the article, is pertinent to the music video because dancing is consistently shown. The introduction to *Blossom* is a dancing sequence, changing from season to season. The opening sequence in the show are much like the dancing near the beginning and periodically shown throughout the music video, intentionally circled back to among other scenes of togetherness, when Julia Shapiro sings the chorus, “To all the girls / In the world...” (Chastity Belt, 2015). *Blossom*’s first season introductory sequence as elements that are near identical to specific scenes in “Cool Slut.” I connect the sensibilities of the “Cool Slut” music video to *Blossom* through a brief analysis of the show, employing Machin’s (2010) analytical method of metaphorical association.¹⁶ *Blossom* is not the only one of its kind in the ‘90s, but for the purposes of this study, I focus on this singularity.

¹⁶ Machin (2010) recognizes metaphorical association as the way in which “visual elements can have meaning through the way in which they resemble things, or certain qualities of things in the real world.” *Blossom* is a fictional world but remains to work like metaphorical association because of its noticeable crossovers with the music video’s fictional world.

Like the music video, pink text is used for the opening credits in *Blossom*. In addition, Blossom awkwardly dances alone in her bedroom in a similar style of the group and individual actors in the music video. Props are similar. Blossom uses a chair, like the one Chastity Belt's Julia Shapiro sits in while playing various instruments. Undertones are sexual in both. Blossom dances suggestively with her legs spread wide apart to straddle the chair, bending backward to face the camera; in the "Cool Slut" music video, Shapiro does not dance in the chair, but she does wear a short dress, different from the modest, floral '90s clothing prevalent elsewhere in the video and crosses her legs like that of a sophisticated seductress. Blossom looks directly into the camera as if everything she does is trying to capture the viewer, indicating that the intended audience is male. She picks up her phone, shows it to the camera (as if to state her popularity) and begins speaking into the receiver. On the other end, it is assumed to be her best friend Six. Her hand-held camera drops, as does the viewer's frame. When the camera drops, Blossom drops the phone, as if in that moment, she prioritizes the male viewer over her friendship. Like Blossom, the band members look directly at the camera for most of the video until the end when they walk away from it, diverting their attention to their own friendship. This inclusion acts as a resolve to Blossom's obsessive tendency to grab the male viewer. Contrary to Chastity Belt, Bialik/Blossom does not have the ability to appropriate girlhood because she herself is a young girl, wrapped up in adolescent romanticizing.



Figure 4.3. With pink text on screen, Blossom dances for the camera in the first image. The second image is Blossom using the white chair to perform.

In the '90s television began to lead with female characters, while male parts were sidelined, and the characterizations were dumbed down (Glascok, 2001). *Blossom* illustrates through the role of Blossom's brother Joey, who plays the stereotypical air-headed-jock type. This shift in gender roles, beginning in the 1980s aligns with the girl power movement. Postfeminism had yet to take off, so perspectives on sexual agency were more nascent. However, the music video communicates a message of empowerment and like the sitcom, not just empowerment, but the empowerment of adolescent girls. This is reflective of the 90s Girl Power movement as developed by Bikini Kill, later brought into the mainstream consciousness by the Spice Girls.¹⁷

A Contrived Girlhood

Is the position of girls specific to the subcultural option, or do their roles reflect the more general subordination of women in mainstream culture?

—McRobbie & Garber, 1978/2000, p. 14

¹⁷ See Hains (2014) for perspectives on tensions between Riot Grrrls' feminist message and its commercialization brought on by the Spice Girls.

Girl empowerment messages that pervaded the '90s decade took on many forms, one of which is appropriation, like the “kinderwhore” sexualized baby doll¹⁸ aesthetic championed by grunge icons like Courtney Love in the mid-1990s. In all its symbolic glory, the intention behind the kinderwhore aesthetic was to question the cultural importance of beauty standards. In her article titled “my kinderwhore education,” Mish Way (2015) of punk rock band White Lung writes:

Kinderwhore was a strong feminist statement. It was about so much more than a little velvet dress, ripped tights and a dumb media-made label. It was about intentionally taking the most constraining parts of the feminine, good-girl aesthetic, inflating them to a cartoon level, and subverting them to kill any ingrained insecurities.

Women rock musicians of the '90s deliberately cultivated girlish identities as a means to upend patriarchal discourse. Wald (1998) addresses the politics of appropriating girlhood by examining Gwen Stefani's song “Just a Girl” and Stefani's performance in how staged “disparate modes of femininity” (p. 586). Celebrating girlhood through contrived forms became a “cultural dominant” for women musicians at that time, serving to “foster youth subculture” and to construct “narratives that disrupt patriarchal discourse within traditionally male rock subcultures” (Wald, 1998, p. 588). These displays signaled new female rock subjectivities, “signposting the incorporation ... of ironic, postmodern modes of gender performance” (p. 588).

LeBlanc (1999) writes about girl resistance to a boy-owned punk subculture and describes five rules for woman formulated by two psychologists, which are: be attractive, be a lady, be unselfish and of service, make relationships work and be competent without complaint

¹⁸ See Chandler (2011) for a look at Riot Grrrl use of doll imagery and its political and economic implications.

(p. 138, citing Bepko & Krestan). Leblanc argues that these rules, as part of female socialization, is responsible for the “lowering of girls’ self-esteem in early adolescence” (p. 138). To some degree, through acting as though they are adolescents, the band gets at the seed before it sprouts, attempting to dismantle normative conceptions of femininity by dismantling preconceived notions of girlhood. Chastity Belt draws on this ‘90s rock feminist logic and appropriates girlhood, as evidenced by many semiotic resources. But different than women on real life stages, where the performer’s age is not in question, the video in this case is a fictional narrative. In a fictional narrative where actors are older than the age they are depicting, appropriation must be performed in a particular way and the devices used to enact appropriation clash and cause dissonance. Feminism was a contentious discourse within the Girl Power movement because for some, Girl Power was a conscious disengagement from feminism. As Taft (2004) claims, notions of Girl Power were deployed to move postfeminism along, i.e., move along “the argument that women and girls are doing fine, feminism is unnecessary, and the movement is over” (p.72). In some cases, media also portrayed Girl Power to be an individual solution, of personal responsibility (Taft, 2004). In the case of Chastity Belt, the depiction of girlhood indicates a slide in the direction of Riot Grrrl’s usage, although not as visceral. It is also a cultural criticism of fetishizing girlhood for the sake of pushing a feminist, or quasi-feminist agenda. The music video’s satire allows play between both ends. Images are consistently played with, evading the viewer’s ability to grab hold, making critical to look at granular codes and the relationships among them.

Girl-ish Clothing and Behavior. As discussed previously, clothing in the video is a throwback to an earlier time, but I also mentioned that clothing can indicate other character details. Clothing is like language, it is a “medium that expresses a range of social information”

(McCracken & Roth, 1989, p. 13). In her book on the symbolism and sociology of women's clothing, Gilman (2002) lists five primary motives behind clothing: protection, warmth, decoration, modesty and symbolism. I am most concerned with her discussion on modesty and contextualization of the concept in youth and in "sex-consciousness" (Gilman, 2002, p.10). Aside from introducing a different time period, the colorful clothing points to a younger age. When the band members are not wearing jeans, they wear vibrant skirts and dresses. The stockings that are worn with skirts and dresses expresses a level of modesty. Flesh does not show below the waist. The modesty has a connection to youth when the band members' behaviors are also examined—they act with a silliness and innocence, most of the time. However, Shapiro wears a more suggestive outfit in one scene and in another, she attempts to take off her top. She does this awkwardly, struggling to unclothe, which signifies she has a lack of experience in unclothing. This signifies that she and the others are in their mid-teens just beginning to explore sexuality. Similar in nature to Shapiro's strip scene, drummer Gretchen Grimm dances but does so awkwardly, as if she has not had enough life experience to master sexy dancing. While these scenes are more suggestive, teenage years still have a place in the realm of girlhood; the clumsiness still allows these scenes to communicate youth. The interactions between character and viewer are striking in these scenes. In these scenes, more than any other, the viewer is forced to interact through a sexualized gaze because of close-ups angles, emphasizing the contrived nature of the video's girlhood.

Exact age group of the characters are always in question throughout the video, as if age is on a sliding scale throughout all scenes. Most often the behavior indicates a younger age in how behavior is marked with awkwardness, clumsiness, silliness and engagement in games like hide and seek. In an opening scene, a wide oak tree is in center of frame, then all for band members

pop out from behind the tree. In another scene, Shapiro plays on a keyboard and after a wipe, she is gone from the chair only to pop out from behind the chair's back. The presumed age in these scenes is young. On the contrary, Shapiro plays the clarinet with a short dress with a sophisticated approach in one scene. Shapiro playing the clarinet is another moment of drawing the male gaze. But rarely does youth get dismantled through more mature behaviors. In another scene of instrument playing, Shapiro plays the keyboard like a tween signified by her clothing colors, the bucket hat and the quirky approach to playing. Nevertheless, therein lies a juxtaposition of child-like behaviors and more mature behaviors. Grouped together are games of peekaboo, instances that lack grace, the sexually suggestive and the ability to play instruments as if they have more experience than what childhood would allow.



Figure 4.4. In the first set of pictures, band members play hide and seek behind a tree. In the second set, Julia Shapiro is playing hid and seek behind a chair. Both sets of photographs depict child-like personas.

Props. The presumed age and what constitutes “girly” oscillates because of other elements like props. I have called on the umbrellas in the opening dancing scene as part of ‘90s fashion, but such umbrellas extend to the age group that would use them. Another prop is the pair of rollerblades used by Annie Truscott, the bassist. Rollerblading is reminiscent of the California beach scene, where women in bikinis smoothly glide with rollerblades across beachside cements with long windswept hair. However, rollerblading in loose fitting attire with a messy ponytail has the dominant reading of a tomboyishness, which will be part of the discussion on stereotypes used to create the video’s stock characters. This scene represents a break from a typical girl’s hobby, questioning the notion of there being some “girly” behavior. Her rollerblades represent not just age, but an exception to the rule.

Other props that indicate girlhood, but are contradicted simultaneously, are in the kitchen scenes. In the first kitchen scene, the actors toast and drink red wine while the pudding packs sit at the center at the table, waiting to be eaten. Juxtaposing props. The girls drink the wine in a way that evokes the thought that they are doing it without their parents' knowledge or that they have never consumed alcohol before. In the second scene, I put aside the possibility that the pudding simply tastes good to note how the pudding packs are eaten sensually, an adjective solidified through the drama created from the camera close-up of Truscott slowly licking the spoon. Eating chocolate in this way is also reminiscent of the stereotypical middle-aged woman whose guilty pleasure is the occasional chocolate bar. The kitchen scenes are loaded with inconsistency which leaves the viewer puzzled as to how to pinpoint appropriation, how the band works in ideology through the props. But once again, curiosity is the point. To smoothly track the actions of the video's narrative would defeat the purpose of upending gender expectation.



Figure 4.5. Annie Truscott, the drummer, enjoys her pudding indicated by slowly licking the spoon, tilting her head and closing her eyes. The age of the typical snack pack consumer contrasts the age of a wine typical consumer; thus, girlhood is more of devised image.

Community and Solidarity. McRobbie and Garber (1978/2000) call attention to one aspect of girlhood “tight-knit friendship groups” (p. 24). The togetherness among the band members is a significant part of the music video, taking up about half the space, coinciding with

the song's vocalized address to "girls." Beyond girlhood, bonds among women are an important theme in many feminist strands of theory. Grievances, collective identity, organization and opportunity are identified when social movements are constructed (Ferree & Hess, 2000). All of those elements are exhibited in and outside of the video—collective grievance on gender inequality, the shared identity among the girls/women/band members, multiple women getting together to address the issue and an organized effort to convey this message through media. A movement within a larger movement.

Here, I focus on the collective identity among the women, which is fundamental to the notions of community and solidarity. As Ferree and Hess (2000) point out, collective identity is not a given, only happening through a process of struggle, and works in three ways: group consciousness, empowerment and representation. I argue that all three are present, but representation is the most visible element, defined by interaction or "a way of acting and being reacted to as a member of a group" (Ferree & Hess, 2000, p. 29). Ferree and Hess note that the collective actor's identity is the identity that "an individual has actively created in concert with others" and "understanding oneself as acting on behalf of a larger group" (2000, p. 29). Ferree and Hess calls these necessary conditions for the emergence of another women's movement apart from the one in the 1960s. The dynamics were different then as intersectional feminism and multiplicity has been acknowledged, but as Lyshaug (2006) notes, effective change comes through both accommodation and affirmation of difference. Political unity and political claims of diversity of women can coexist. The band cannot speak on behalf of all women, which could be the reason for using satire. Satire can produce multiple meanings, but the feminist framework is still clearly insinuated.

Representation lacks palpability in a single mode of women not *explicitly* acting on behalf of a collective, but in the video, representation is implied through the interaction between character and viewer. This happens most prominently in the song's direct address to girls everywhere: "To all the girls in the world" (Chastity Belt, 2015). The female viewer should know that one of the most prominent lessons in the video is the value of friendship. The female knows that characters pretend she is male for humor's sake, which further instills solidarity among girls and women everywhere who experience the same implied ideations presented in the video through the gaze. The representation quality of collective identity manifests among the characters in the video, in the nurturing of one another. The value of engaging with one another works in tandem with fluid subjectivity, always in process and acknowledge difference.

On the surface, certain instances disrupt the dominant code of solidarity, such as evocations of a sexualized gaze, through character and camera. At times, individuals are separated from the group, which can work in tandem with sexualization, but also to simply contradict the notion of girl friendships. An all-in-one example is the scene when Shapiro plays instruments for her friends. Shapiro's dress, the drama of her performance, the camera angle and her separation from the group as they gaze upon her from the opposite side of the room have sexualized underpinnings. The couch scenes, among others gestural techniques, could also be a criticism of the star convention in music video and the sexualized female lead singer more generally. Although the lead-vocalist Shapiro is not the only band member performing for her friends in isolation, she does it within the most mature way. Moreover, Shapiro as star is emphasized through an instance of video editing when a star-shaped transition outlines Shapiro when she plays the keyboard in the beginning of the video. The consequential rifts in closeness, in reprioritizing relationships, is typically offset with stereotypical, exaggerated and thus

subverted characterization, realigning with notions of solidarity. Social bonding and intra-group empowerment and encouragement are most consistent in the video, even in the couch scenes that have an isolative element.



Figure 4.6. Band members are walking together on the grassy field three separate times in the video, with each time straying farther away from the gaze of the camera.

In addition to the couch scenes, the scenes that illustrate tight bonds among the girls are when they walk across the field. The group's friendship in the first two field scenes is brought to the fore because of the song's alignment through the chorus, which addresses the viewers, "To all the girls in the world / Trying to take off their shirts / Ladies it's okay to be / It's okay to be slutty" (Chastity Belt, 2015). In the first instance, they skip together towards the camera; Truscott's crotch ends the shot. In the second scene, the girls walk towards the camera, waving at the camera, but unlike the first scene, they begin to slightly walk past it. In the last scene, the girls divert their attention away from the camera completely, walking past it at a distance, to signify reprioritizing relationships—I have mentioned this previously in my discussion on *Blossom*'s title sequence and the lead star's over-the-top tendency to grab a male gaze, which contrasts Chastity Belt's focus on viewer and by the end a resolve of diverted attention. In the last scene, no lyrics signal their solidarity, it is as if boys and their relationships to boys are not even a thought.

Juxtaposition Image and Song

In his aptly titled article “Editing for subtext: Altering the meaning of the narrative,” Kenneth Dancyger (2009) argues that “two guiding principles dominate editing—narrative clarity and dramatic emphasis” (p. 38). He also mentions that editing does not necessarily have a straightforward goal. When juxtaposing two elements, the music video’s satire become more recognizable and intelligible. The viewer notices what is being criticized through its ridiculous. Layers of meaning build up and wraps itself around the video’s story and the intention behind the creative project, and they wrap themselves around the viewer creating Sellnow and Sellnow’s (2001) concept of an “illusion of life.” However, more meaning creates a tug of war. Meaning is injected into the narrative through stark contrasts, but the clarity of this meaning becomes more muddled simultaneously. Juxtaposition creates a perplexity within the viewer, who continually tries to unravel and understand the message’s core and what is being subverted. The viewer knows what everything means, but the truth continually fades because in the postmodern way, the video prevents universal truth from appearing to the mind.

Song. While the central purpose of this section is describing the ways in which image and song are placed next to each other to create discrepancy, first I state that the song in and of itself hosts contradiction in three locations—within the lyrics, within the music and in the relationship between the lyrics and music. The lyrics imply the target audience to be girls, girls are addressed, but in the same stanza, Shapiro sings, “it’s okay to be slutty” (Chastity Belt, 2015). Within the same stanza, there is another contradiction, and that is the use of the word “girls” in the first line and the use of the word “ladies” in the third line. The juxtaposition indicates a contrived girlhood, or an address to two separate age groups. Within the music, there are stark contrasts, but what still creates an even flow. The music host continual highs and lows, but there is

harmony. With each turn, there is inferred meaning. The chorus' break is significantly coincides with solidarity. Here, the song is at its height. When tones drop, Shapiro sings about the notion of slutty behavior. The contrast of the two and their meanings may point to a doubt behind giving oneself away with care, which will be discussed below in a brief analysis of the album.

Conflicting ideas also emerge through the relationship between the lyrics and the music. The music generally takes on a more muted, modest approach, at least when compared to the sexually explicit lyrics, what could be described as a call to action directed at girls everywhere—complacency versus action. In this way, the lyrics propose a near antithesis. When examining the relationship between the video's narrative through image and the song,¹⁹ the juxtaposition between young and old, modest and sexual, feminine and masculine becomes even more clear.

Characters. The movements in the music video are calculated as examined through the temporal locations of the song and their correspondence with image. The song begins with slower, light guitar, making the tranquil scenes of water by the docks in a suitable position as the video begins. With each shift of guitar sound from high to low, the scene changes to a different perspective of the water and dock. The slower, alternating guitar sounds begin to break open through faster guitar playing and introduction of drums, and this is when group is brought into the video and juxtaposition begins to occur. After the instrumental introduction showing the band by the water and dancing in front of the brick wall, the vocals hit, "We're just a couple of" (Chastity Belt, 2015). Shapiro's vocal overlap with the image of the band plopping down on the couch. When the word "sluts" arises, so does the beginning of Shapiro's, or "Jules," scenes. She innocently sitting on the bench, not engaging in "slutty" behavior. The lyrics "going out on the

¹⁹ Adopted from Carol Vernallis' (1998) analysis of Madonna's "Cherish" music video. Vernallis uses an appendix for both the video narrative and lyrics to simplify connections.

town / fooling around” are sung when Shapiro is shown in the house, *not* going around on the town, and in these few scenes of her in the house, she behaves in a silly, awkward way. When Shapiro sings “Getting all dress up” guitarist Lydia Lund’s scenes appear and she is dressed down, meaning she’s wearing a jacket and jeans and her hair is unkempt, tucked up into a baseball cap. When the second half of the line, “Just to dress back down” plays, Lund is more “dressed up,” if the viewer counts the hair flowing without the cap, while walking through a greenhouse smelling flowers. Through the interplay lyrics and imagery, the viewer witnesses quickly formed, consistent juxtaposition. Some juxtapositions occur as quick as intra-line, rather with the alternation from an entire line to the next.

During the chorus, when Shapiro sings the last half, “Ladies it’s okay to be/ It’s okay to be slutty” (Chastity Belt, 2015) the girls are awkwardly dancing in front of the brick wall, as if the awkward dancing could be considered promiscuous, which is a ridiculous rendering, a satire. On the next go around of “We’re just a couple of sluts,” Truscott is introduced while rollerblading, once again, a girl not engaging in “slutty” behavior. Similar to Truscott’s scene, when “grind up on everyone” is sung, “Gretch” is shown dropping off a library book then falling off a chair clumsily inside the living room. In the last chorus section, when “trying to take of their shirts” is sung, Shapiro fumbles to take off her shirt. As mentioned, the awkwardness of most of the sexually suggestive scenes in the video points to the characters not having the experience that they should have if they were to be considered a “slut.” Maybe most important is that the character depictions point to the male viewers still potentially seeing this scene as “slutty,” regardless of how awkward and unslutty the undressing is. The male viewer might call a girl “slutty” for the sheer fact that she is a girl. With or without agency, she is subject to this hegemonic label. As Vernallis (2004) suggests, it may be relevant to review the relationships

between image, music and lyrics through a sociological lens, like hegemony. Exploring derivatives of hegemony in the context of the “Cool Slut” music video is germane to this analysis as the band creatively tackles the dominant, problematic conceptions of women.

Props. In her article on ‘90s décor throwbacks, Chilton (2018) outlines the “ultrafrilly” aesthetics of ‘90s living rooms and humorously, but relevantly, comments, “This was the mom antidote to your grunge phase” (Chilton, 2018). The floral couch is ultra-frilly, and it contrasts the sexually explicit nature of the song’s lyrics, what might be considered more “grungy” subject matter. Similarly, ‘90s minimalism discussed by Chilton contrasts grunge or rock culture, somewhat in the vein of Chastity Belt. Props used by each band member, whether in hand or as part of setting, contrasts the song’s message of validating slutty behavior. For instance, the meaning potential of Lund’s book for identifying plants or Grimm’s library book signifies the opposite of “slutty” behavior. Through these juxtapositions, Chastity Belt complicates the character, despite each character playing the role of some feminine stereotype. If girls do engage in sexual acts, no individual is as one-dimensional as a label implies. On the other hand, as Lintott and Irvin (2016) note, “appreciating sexiness is part of recognizing a person’s full humanity” (p. 316). Satirizing through the juxtaposition of image and lyrics also expresses an embrace of sexuality. Within these moments of stark contrast, the band enacts a feminist act through multiple meaning potentials.

Performing Gender through Stock Characters

Stereotypes are constructed and deconstructed simultaneously throughout the video, a process that carries the narrative in critical directions. However, this process does not prevent the viewer from reading band members as archetypal characters that are in successful sitcom formulas. In Mary Talbot’s (2008) article “Gender Stereotypes: Reproduction and Challenge,”

she writes, “As a representational practice, stereotyping involves simplification, reduction and naturalization” (p. 470). Stereotyping maintains social and symbolic order and involves a process of “splitting,” by means of “the normal and the acceptable are separated from the abnormal and the unacceptable, resulting in the exclusion of the latter” (Talbot, 2008, p. 471). Stereotyping fixes difference and creates an Us versus Them within an imagined community (Talbot, 2008, citing Hall, 1997). The use of stereotypes in the video is a strategic move, separating the viewer from character to exaggerate the “normal” behaviors on screen and the “abnormal” behaviors voiced in the song, apart from the viewer whose identity is inevitably multifaceted. This implies that women are passive and because male gaze is evoked through the video, the male viewer is an active constituent of their identity.

The video’s narrative relies on each of the band members being introduced then showing a part of themselves through hobbies. Each run of scenes for the individual members are like stories within the larger story, but they do not fulfill the story arch. Only a loose sense of intimacy develops between the viewer and actors. Reflecting Vernallis’ (2004) sentiment on mixed space inferring subjectivity, band members go from place to place, showing different facets of themselves. Band members go from place to place, but still spend a significant time in the home—Vernallis also notes the domestic space gives the viewer a sense of control. But the viewer never truly knows them because each facet is part of larger cliché characterizations. Gender stereotypes get reinforced through setting, like the common image of women in the same domestic space that gives the viewer a sense of control (Vernallis, 2004). The music video indicates character types unmoving in their roles, rather than characters with agency. Generally, the lack of complexity in each character prevents the viewer from deeply connecting to the characters. Yes, each band member engages in an activity that viewers have probably done

before, but the portrayals are bland, over-the-top and most obviously being made fun of due to that same portrayal. Nevertheless, contention *is* created through imagery to create some semblance of complexity in the characters.

In *'Girl Power': girls reinventing girlhood* Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) address cultural constructions of girls, like movies and newspapers, largely sensationalizing and essentializing them. They note that girls are not a homogeneous group and in fact identify along a spectrum. In some respects, the “Cool Slut” music video reflects this reality. There are a few breaths of disruption, such as characters exhibiting both girlish and boyish qualities, like Truscott wearing red lipstick and flipping her hair towards the camera as she takes off her bicycle helmet. In their study on cognitive approaches to gender development, Martin and Dinella (2010) find that tomboys align with some aspects of feminine stereotypes but express less congruence with those stereotypes because of their gender non-normative interests. The authors note that tomboys do not swing one way or another completely, that “tomboys may not have broader stereotypes or engage in a wholesale rejection of stereotypes; instead, they are willing to cross gendered boundaries” (Martin & Dinella, 2010, p. 608). Within this study, a finding supports a disrupted stereotype, a constructed binary is tackled, much like the mixed codes in the video.

The viewer may gather that part of the conveyed feminism of the video is showing true-to-life female characters. Possibly the most prevalent disruption is the oscillation of presumed age; pinpointing a stereotype is made difficult by differential aged behaviors. The fluctuating age is characteristic of all band members, a common thread proposing that the individual has many different faces, the silly and the serious, a true-to-life sentiment. Three different age ranges are vaguely discernible, more clearly discernible for some—the young girl, the teenager and the young adult. Each band member exhibits girlish, teenager and more mature qualities through

clothing and behavior. The middle age range presents the most distinguishable stereotype, maybe because teenagerhood is the period of most exploration. Here, I note that while this is a distinguishable depiction, the moments that make up these depictions can be fleeting. In other words, there could be a glimpse of a particular character type, rather than prolonged viewing of this type. The two other ranges, tween and young adult, are most unchanging. For this reason, I focus on the teenager depiction for each band member. However, qualities overlap among the age ranges for some of the band members, which I will attend to.

Jules, the Singer-songwriter. Vocalist Julia Shapiro, or “Jules” in the music video, is depicted as the sensitive singer-songwriter type, most emphasized in the beginning when she sits on the picnic table. She strums her guitar, sings and has a thoughtful expression whilst looking to the sky. From her expression, she does not seem to be grounded, her head is in the clouds. She is a romantic, probably singing about love—this is to acknowledge that what she is singing is not in line with the time or mouth movement of the song’s lyrics, which are about being a slut. Harding and Nett’s (1984) observation in the transition between the “asexual” folk singer type like Joni Mitchell, what the authors consider a “setback” in rock music, to sexually liberated artists like Janis Joplin (p. 63). Shapiro’s characterization changes in the following scene with a wardrobe change, sporting a bucket hat and playing the keyboard with a wide smile, bouncing her head. Here, the meaning potential is that she is a spunky tween, whereas before she could have been in high school, when existential crises begin to take root and thoughts fly away into the ether, probably about a guy. Children are more present, living in the moment, having fun, larger social and cultural problems are inconceivable to them. The third age depicted is in the scenes where she plays the harp and clarinet wearing a cocktail dress. The stereotype is not as easily identifiable in this third age group, but she remains to be the musically inclined one. Here, I note

that Shapiro seems to be the most complex character, or the character with the most depth. The clothing and props change most frequently, but she also has more screen time, allowing the viewer to pick up on her subjectivity.

Lydia, the Naturalist. Guitarist Lydia Lund, or “Lydia” in the video, acts in scenes that show her close to nature. In her first scene, she is on the beach, where the camera is angled down at her from high above. Standing on the beach, she looks up through binoculars, presumably bird watching. In the next scene, the viewer sees her reading through a book for identifying plants, inferred from her crouching next to a tree as she reads through the book. Lydia is portrayed as down to earth, literally—through the camera angle focused down on her but also in the way she presents herself, unkempt with a hair tucked into a baseball cap. Lund continues to be shown enjoying nature, as she walks through a greenhouse. When she walks through the greenhouse, she is feminized with her hair down, possibly indicating an older age. She smells white and pink flowers, also purist, feminine colors. In this setting, she is more concerned with dazzling the viewer in how the camera is at a low angle as she walks through and in how she smiles at the camera while smelling flowers. Lund smiles once before in the scene of her standing and reading through her plant book on the sidewalk, but she appears more annoyed than trying to allure the viewer with a smile seemingly done out of obligation. Compared to Shapiro and Grimm, there are less scenes of Lund acting out in the youngest age range.

Annie, the Athlete. Annie Truscott, or “Annie” in the video, is the athlete. Truscott is shown rollerblading, running and in the last scene she takes off a bike helmet as if she just got back from a ride. The first sequence is of her rollerblading, with the camera situated toward the ground and only her rollerblades showing in the shot. The emphasis on her rollerblades indicates that rollerblading, or more generally athletics, defines her person. Truscott wears boyish,

oversized clothing as she rollerblades. In the next shots, Truscott is running with a pink jumpsuit. Like Lund, Truscott's middle-age range shots of her running show her more feminized because of the pink gear. She stops to tie her shoes and she slowly lifts her face to the camera with a big smile as if trying to attract the viewer. When she rollerbladed, she throws peace signs at the camera with excitement, but more nonchalantly. In the last individual scene of Truscott, she takes off her bike helmet while flipping her hair towards the camera wearing red lipstick. The more solemn facial expression and red lipstick mirrors the sentiments of Shapiro's scenes where she wears a cocktail dress—both depictions are of an older age. In this last scene she is much more glamorized, leaving the viewer with the thought that she is feigning the act of having exercised. Nevertheless, her athletic character is shown throughout all aged phases.

Gretch, the Bookworm. Gretchen Grimm, or “Gretch,” is the intelligent one, realized through multiple scenes. Her stereotype is most clearly defined when she drops off a book at the library. In this scene, she snarks at the camera as if proving herself intelligent despite being a woman. Another element that adds to this conception of Grimm is the scene of her walking along the beach. While this is a romantic act, like Shapiro's picnic table scene, Grimm is less removed from reality. She looks to the water, not the sky. Grimm, as a younger self, teaches the girls how to dance as they sit on the couch. Thus, Grimm is in an educator role. Like nerds depicted in much of 90s media, Grimm has the least charm. She is the clumsiest, as seen when she dramatically falls off the chair in the living room. Although acting within different age ranges, Grimm's chair scene may act as a contrast to Shapiro's scenes where she plays the clarinet in a cocktail dress. Shapiro can be sexy, while Grimm is clunky. Even when Shapiro does act within the same depicted age group, also sitting in the iconic white chair, she plays the keyboard

seamlessly, notwithstanding the girlish bounce and facial expressions. Shapiro manages to not fall off the chair.

Tending to Exclusion

Absence is just as significant as what is shown on the screen. Here, my focus is the privilege of the band members, inevitably carried over from real life to the music video's imaginary and what that means. Here, I describe how privilege manifests in the narrative through its whiteness and the presumed socioeconomic status of its characters. The "normative essence" of whiteness makes it universalizing as whiteness is invisible because it exists at the center, and yet, whiteness holds great political influence (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Because of the political influence of whiteness, because the video is charged with a feminist politic and because the video is shown to have no conception, or representation, of intersection, this analysis must critique the absence of Black woman's voice.

Railton and Watson (2011) note that "the capacity to define and redefine privileges white in the imaginary and, moreover, that symbolic privilege is one of the keyways in which power is negotiated, performed and ultimately secured" (p. 103). If this case study did not examine the privileges afford to the narrative's characters, the analysis would be incomplete and would be an injustice, a slight to feminists of color. The purpose of this study is not to prove or label the video as necessarily feminist; the purpose is to show how it could be, how the video's construction complicates communication. Music video often reflects and exaggerates cultural stereotypes, but music videos also make it more difficult to assert what kind of cultural work the video is doing (Vernallis, 2004). For example, how this brand of feminism may not apply to other sects of people—to people who are not white or in the same exhibited social class. To do interrogate this aspect of absence, I acknowledge and affirm multiplicity. Satire as an intentional

strategy to make meanings ambiguous, used as a device to invent universal feminism, a problematic construct.²⁰

Characters and Lyrics. The band's whiteness allows its members to present and represent themselves, in other words, have space of reinvention, whereas Black bodies do not have this luxury and have historically been denied such luxury. Railton and Watson (2011) write:

one implication of the 'naturalness' of black sexuality is that it is inevitably embodied, anchored to, and enacted through, the flesh of the body itself. The denaturalisation of white sexuality, by distinction, means that it is relatively disconnected from the corporeality of the body, residing instead in the image/vision of the body, indeed the presentation and representation of it. (p.103)

The music video gives band members the access to argue for their agency, their desire and sexuality within a society that constrains them. Whiteness gives the band the space to argue against society because they are representing an ideology, not already embodying it. Band members have the flexibility before the argument is even made. On the other hand, Black bodies are "rendered simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible, and pathologized in dominant discourses" (Hammonds, 1997/2008, p. 249). Black bodies are already sexually

²⁰ Lyshaug (2006) problematizes coalition building, advocating that theorists of solidarity "supplement their appeal to coalition building with an account of the ethical and affective preconditions of inclusive political ties" (p. 77). In part, Lyshaug examines the ironic failure of second-wave feminism's "sisterhood" to include marginalized voices, such as those from working-class class, lesbians and women of color. The politics of the time suppressed those distinctive voices. Lyshaug's concept of "enlarged sympathy" acts as a resolve to the issue of erasing difference, noting that enlarged sympathy allows a necessary distance between self and other and "counters any temptation to assume that one can identify with them in a complete or final way" (2006, p. 97); Oyèrónké Oye'wùmí (1997/2008) interrogates the Western version of feminism, how imperialism's immediate effect is injecting problems where issues originally did not exist" (p. 168). She refers to African societies where sex or gender constructs are absent, thus the feminism attempting to address and subvert gender roles is useless and furthermore, harmful.

objectified. So, to advocate for women to be slutty, or to say that promiscuous behavior is okay, is a privilege of the privileged. I say this as someone who believes in the message, but with an awareness that not everyone can hold this same view because of societal position. White women can easily reclaim the label “slut” because “slut” is a derogatory term for white women because they are already supposed to be “pure, passionless and de-sexed,” contrary to Black women who have been historically conceptualized as “the epitome of immorality, pathology, impurity, and sex itself” (Hammonds, 1997/2008, p. 251). Because Black women have always been placed in this socially constructed preexisting condition, the “slut” label is not so much an option.

Dynamics of purity and impurity spark the notion of respectability politics,²¹ what continues to influence the behavior of Black people today. Linda Patton (2014) writes that respectability politics “allow African Americans to revise themselves in ways to ensure that they are constructed in a positive light and deemed worthy amidst a cadre of images and discourses that counter their humanity” and “this same ideology reinscribes oppression by adhering to hegemonic standards of what it means to be respectable” (p. 731).²² She notes that there is a desire to be liked and respected, but within these politics, respect comes from appealing to a racist system, creating a tight rope for marginalized groups. Which feminists can reasonably

²¹ See Hammonds (1997/2008) for a history of how respectability politics, or what she calls a “politics of silence,” developed.

²² Florini (2019) offers a substantive example of how Black Twitter “refuses to codeswitch in ways that might make their communication practices more accessible to audiences” (p. 35). The study is an example that represents an acknowledgement of respectability politics and Black people still staking a claim to space regardless of what retains respect, or specific to this case, regardless of what garners the most understanding. Questioning who gets to call themselves a slut is not to uphold a politics of silence, but it does serve the purpose of at least noticing a historically relevant device used by Black women in particular and what continues to be a device that perpetuates hegemonic racism.

voice sexual reclamation, the prevailing attitude illustrated through the lyrics and image in the “Cool Slut” music video?

Setting and Props. Vernallis (2004) outlines the ways in which social status and white privilege is indicated using settings, such as in the use of a “series of sites” (p. 85). Band members move with ease amidst the scenes through editing. In the beginning, boats are shown at a dock, luxury items, and then the band members are seen sitting on a bench by the water. Thereafter, some band members stand or walk along a beach in various shots. While these spaces may have public access, they are still considered prime real estate. Band members are also shown walking a large grassy field, inhabiting the field on their own, for the most part, indicating a sort of privilege. Band members also find themselves inside of what looks to be a middle-class home²³, based on the size of the living room, the furniture that lay about it, the kitchen area’s size and the items that area holds. The domestic space relates to what Vernallis argues about “fanciful” settings and the assertion of white privilege. The viewer is also consistently taken to the front of a brick wall, used in the scenes where the band members dance in a line, which evokes a city feel, providing a different location in the “series of sites.” Vernallis (2004) argues that settings can “provide suggestions on how to inhabit our bodies” (p. 97). If this is the case in the music video, suggestions to the viewer are to roam carefree, but with financial cushion as if that is possibly for all viewers. I extend “roam carefree” to roaming along certain feminist ideological lines that centers sexuality as if it sexuality was at once decentered. The project’s

²³ The working-class is a disenfranchised group and one of the groups of people who were suppressed in earlier feminist movements, which intersects with Othered identities (Lyshaug, 2006); See McRobbie and Garber (1978/2000) for the specificities located among working-class girls in subcultural terrain, such only subculture only offering leisure rather than middle-class subculture’s option of fulltime careers. But also the differences of subcultural patterns among working-class girls and working-class boys, further detailed in McRobbie’s 1977 thesis extract “Working-class girls and the culture of femininity.”

intention remains to be more about reaching the female viewer in on the joke, however, Vernallis makes an insightful, relevant comment to this video's setting:

Though music videos can demonstrate how to walk in suburbia with a sense of ironic distance, they seem unable to suggest attitudes of rage or commitment. Cultural critics may well become frustrated with music videos, because they most often do make good on the songs' liberatory possibilities. (p. 98)

Settings are used to appeal to a particular audience, preventing intended meanings from always carrying over into the (Othered) viewer's mind or preventing the (Othered) viewer from being able to identify. In the video, satire calls on boundaries to be erected through historical era and other means, but one potential unforeseen consequence could be the privileged scenery disrupting sought out connection.

Vernallis (2004) notes that "any object possesses a set of culturally determined meanings, values, and uses" (p. 100). I have already examined some of the meaning potentials that props possess within the bounds of other emergent themes. Here, I give a more detailed examination of how objects in the video present the socioeconomic status of the characters, a continued look at disruptive privilege, integral to the middle-class setting briefly described. In the living room, the white skirted chair, white pleated lamp and decorative art have a luxurious look. The house plants, while some bigger than others, exude opulence. The floral couch looks cozy more than ornate, but if I consider the space outside of the video and the ability to partake in a creative endeavor like this, a vintage floral couch is quite an expensive prop to use. I imagine that the price of such a couch may be less in previous decades, as it would not be considered "vintage," but it would not exactly be cheap. Instruments used by the characters point to middle to upper class as well—the clarinet and harp, more so than the guitar. In today's market, a beginner's

clarinet starts at around \$500, and the average price of a harp is between \$2,500 and \$5,000. In the kitchen scene, band members drink red wine. The brand is not visible, but even without a label, the image of red wine evokes bourgeois sensibility. The kitchen space also has decorative wall art, and a globe sits in the window behind the girls. Globes are not a typical object in the homes of people with a lower socioeconomic status, as they are somewhat expensive and give the impression that whoever owns them has the ability travel the world. In this case, the parents of the band members' personas have that ability.

Adding Context: *Time to Go Home* album

Following Machin's (2010) suggestions on album cover iconography, I examine the cover's elements that constitute a layer of meaning. I also contextualize "Cool Slut" by examining other songs on the record that present a more genuine and sentimental tone than the primary site of this study, which visually and lyrically encapsulates messages through satire. As an avid music listener, I have always found it important to look at an album as the sum of all its parts. Songs are sometimes integrated into a larger concept, as with the case of *Time to Go Home*. The definition of concept album, according to Oxford Languages, is "a rock album featuring a cycle of songs expressing a particular theme or idea."²⁴ The overall message of the album is centered on woman's self-concept and the experiences that mold her self-concept. Moreover, elements in the album cover are found in the video, as well as in other Chastity Belt music videos, signaling the album's principal spirit. Dozal's (2012) study illustrated that concept albums in the digital age have become "multi-layered experiences in which the concept is free to exist outside of the album" (p. 96).

²⁴ Concept album. (2021). In *Oxford Online Dictionary*. Retrieved from https://www.lexico.com/definition/concept_album

What furthered my interest in adding this piece to the analysis is an insight I read in the *Time to Go Home* review on Pitchfork, in which Cills (2015) writes “Even a song like ‘Cool Slut’, a proud endorsement of sleeping around that would have felt fun and confident on their previous record, feels laden with a layer of doubt here.” The tone varies, as with the song “Cool Slut.” For instance, the first two stanzas, “We’re just a couple of sluts / Going around the town / Fooling around / Getting dressed up / Just to dress back down,” might communicate a matter-of-factness, a “proud endorsement.” At the same time, those lyrics, which use the word “just” could indicate a response to those that atomize them down to sluts, meaning that “slut” is not so great a label. Even more striking is the interpretation that they see what they are doing as degrading to themselves.

Most of the songs on the record do not require listeners to realize the satirical approach, if there is one in the song. Most of the songs only require the listener to dissect the music insofar as common practices of music interpretation, which is, in itself, a taxing process. For “Cool Slut,” the video drives the satire home, making listener efforts easier. When these three elements—the comment made by Cills, the image of the album cover and the other songs on the record—are laid side by side, the messages implicated through various structures and modes in the music video get turned on their head. Acknowledging how this context further complicates the communication taking place is important to parse. A key piece of this analysis is the argument that the newfound context intensifies the ambiguous kind of feminism conveyed and by that, connecting to a wider audience. The ambiguity grants the viewer more leeway in deciding what the video means; the viewer is less trapped in the video’s direction.



Figure 4.7. Album cover of *Time to Go Home*, the record on which “Cool Slut” belongs.

Ghost and Other Iconographies. The album cover shows a caricature of a ghost. The ghost sits on the same couch used in the video. The ghost wears the same hat, or same-styled hat, worn in the music video. The two elements thread the music video and album together. The couch and hat also signify the same tie to the ‘90s decade. The texture and minimalist quality of the album cover also caters to ‘90s aesthetic. By extension, these elements signify the song’s ethos, of girlhood appropriation and the value therein, or do they? Maybe not when the ghost enters frame. When researching ghost symbolism, many sites were about Henrik Ibsen’s 1896 play *Ghosts*. Other results were dream interpretations that say things like ghost is a symbol of “old memories” and “fear,”²⁵ a significant auxiliary interpretation. But the explanation of ghost symbolism from Ibsen’s *Ghosts* CliffsNotes page, is more well defined and neatly translates to meanings found in the video, but also the opposite of the meanings I have already transcribed: “The ghosts are worn ideals and principles of law and order so misapplied that they have no actual significance ... Ghosts are also the lies about the past, perpetrated to the present, which

²⁵ Journey Into Dreams. (n.d.). *Ghost dream symbol and meaning*. Journey Into Dreams. <https://journeyintodreams.com/ghost/>

will haunt the future. Finally, ghosts are the actual and symbolic diseases of heredity which destroy the joy of life in the younger, freer generations.”²⁶

The ghost seems to change everything—it could symbolize Cills’ (2015) mention of doubt. The doubt counters the very direct, explicit claim to sexuality through the lyrics and the satire of the images. I interpret this doubt as the hesitancy in seeking power in sleeping around, or at least accepting/caring if perceived that way. The creative project could be a tribute not to the appropriation of girlhood enacted by feminist rock icons in the 90s, but a tribute to girlhood itself, before sex was a question. I touched on this earlier when discussing the profound sense of community in some moments when the thought of boys has not yet been thrown on the table. But the ghostly doubt injects the image with even more ambivalence. Maybe this doubt deemphasizes whatever meaning making that concerns the actual act of sex, the ontological, and more so emphasizes the need for intentional disregard when it comes to boys’ labels of girls. When girls rely on each other, there is less reliance on the perception of boys. In other words, maybe the band members do not necessarily condone *being* a slut. Instead, maybe they wish that girls “around the world” dismiss the *use* of pejorative labels; in the video, the sexually suggestive parts are so fraught with awkwardness, not lending any credence to someone potentially calling them a slut. If they were, what one would consider to be, a “true” slut, they would take of their shirt with more ease.

The ghost may represent what once was, which can be tied to multiple meanings. One could be at the individual level, in that the song is each band members’ reflection, or collective reflection, on their younger, more carefree selves. They wish that they either saved themselves

²⁶ CliffsNotes. (n.d.). *Ghosts, Henrik Ibsen: Critical Essay Symbols in Ghosts*. CliffsNotes. <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/g/ghosts/critical-essays/symbols-in-ghosts>

from engaging in degrading and meaningless sex, or they wish they were more apathetic about what the outside world has to say. If they were to adhere to the wisdom gathered from this kind of reflection, symbolic diseases would not be transmitted into their adult life. On the band's musical production level, the ghost could indicate the shift from joke songs to the more sentimental. The transition from the jokes to the sentimental can relate to a transition from obscured communication for the sake of safeguarding truly sensitive subjects to transparency about those real issues. The *Time to Go Home* album marks this turn, although some songs like "Cool Slut" arguably carry a different tone. This album exhibits a slow disintegration of a humorous approach. On a larger, more abstract scale, symbolic diseases might allude to the always inevitable discrimination that girls and women face, hinting at the failed idealization of earlier feminist movements that had their own conflicts. The ghost could indicate the need to address feminist causes grounded in the present, in the current reality.

I have explained the significance of the ghost. Now I turn to the couch, the hat and the style to discover meanings in addition to their '90s aesthetic. First, the couch is present in the "Seattle Party" music video from the band's first album, which shows concept (whatever that may be) extending beyond the album in question, locking in the idea of an even grander story arch. The song and its album *No Regerts* reflect the same feminist ethos of "Cool Slut" and the *Time to Go Home Record*, only varying in the degree of satire when looking at the entirety of each album. The '90s minimalism of the album cover entails a stripping down to the essential, to the bare bones, the bare soul. The hat connects to the '90s girlish aesthetic of the music video, which has been largely perceived as appropriation, but when paired with the ghost, the meaning takes on a different form. This pairing connotes the type of address found in the music video to be one that is not worth continuing, or it connotes a stronger claim to the underlying message of

all the songs, including the more satirical. The seriousness of the ghost's presence and facial expression overshadows the appropriative casualness in the image. The photographic style also furnishes the record with a sense of materiality, connoting that the songs are real, they have substance, masks are being thrown away. These connotations lead me to wonder if the song is even more ironic, if the creators have intentionally gone against the ethos of the record by including songs like "Cool Slut." As I have stated, the record seems to be a slow disintegration of the joke to the genuine. When comparing *Time to Go Home* to the content they have recently put out, the band has almost totally neglected any sense of irony or satire. *Time to Go Home* record acts like a first step in that direction and with that, the song. While "Cool Slut" tackles real issues and has a layer of satire, the truth of earlier work was even more muddled. The song "Cool Slut" has a satirical flavor, especially exhibited through the video's image, yet there is a new layer of authenticity. Maybe because the lyrics are a more direct recourse previous songs speaking about a situation without resolve outside of the meta.

Verbal Cues: Album Name and Songs. The album name could indicate all of these sentiments as well—going home to tackle the issues authentically, with the same innocence of a child but with a wisdom that comes from having lived a life of abandon. Time to go home to the true self, not the coping mechanisms that shove important issues deep into the gut. Time to go home, away from suppression perpetuated by jokes or sex or drunkenness or getting high. The first song "Drone" sets up the body of the record that address these ways of coping, using a reflective tone with lyrics like, "I made choice without reason / Choices without reason / Invite strangers in / and leave them" (Chastity Belt, 2015). The band's body of work concerns the detriment of toxic coping mechanisms that the creative force is slowly coming to terms with. In the song "IDC," off the same record, Shapiro sings, "And I can't lie if I don't know the truth /

Just another night, drunk and confused.” Other questionable ways to cope are described in the song “Joke,” also on *Time to Go Home*. In the first verse Shapiro sings, “Nothing serious / Everything’s a joke / When we smoke / It’s all in smoke,” and in the second stanza, “I’m getting better at forgetting / Everything that’s heavier / All a joke / When we smoke.” In “Joke,” the writer acknowledges the conscious effort to forget.

The album’s title song, “Time to Go Home,” is the last song on the record, a significant placement, denoting the record up until this point having been a trip down memory lane or traversing party culture to the arrival at the core of self, or home. In the song Shapiro sings about home cutting through “illusion.” By that, Shapiro may mean the illusion of having fun for the sake of having fun, rather than having fun for the sake of avoiding processing emotion. The meaning potential behind the album’s name and the songs I have drawn on are inherently integral to the album’s concept—attending to the need to address well-being head on. When considering the album’s iconography, the album’s name, album contents and how they work together, perception of “Cool Slut” is somewhat inverted, begging the question of “cool” being used sarcastically.

Conclusion

Through my analysis of the music video’s emergent themes, I described the ways in which Chastity Belt’s approach to feminism delicately walks multiple lines of thought, which accommodates myriad interpretations and possibilities grounded in representational, interactive and compositional elements.²⁷ Those possibilities create an ambivalent viewing experience for the viewer in how the video’s structures come together complicated conception of feminism. The

²⁷ See Aiello and Parry’s (2019) description of the social semiotic method, which defines each of the three elements.

feminist agenda, as interpreted by some, could prove to be problematic, such as perpetuating the sexualization of women. Nevertheless, the music video acknowledges a women's subordinate position in a social structure, which always holds significance. Reclaiming sexuality, inferred from the video, is a valid prospect for feminists. Women should have sexual agency without there being a double standard and without fear of consequence. To undermine gender oppressive constructs, women must liberate themselves unapologetically and perhaps most importantly, with a collective conscious that affirms difference in approach and identity that also recognizes the need for progress. A poststructuralist "equity feminism" overriding "gender feminism,"²⁸ is the emergent structure that fosters multiplicity and inclusivity, and it is possible that satire complicates universal truth enough to accommodate this new framework. However, this chapter allows space for the band's self-reflexivity when looking to their body of work as a whole. Nothing is done outright or spoken in a universal way when all meaning potentials are considered.

²⁸ In *Third wave agenda: being feminist, doing feminism*, Haywood and Drake (1997) reflect on growing up in the latest feminist framework of "equity feminism" contrary to previous "gender feminism." The authors summarize a third wave goal, which is developing "modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity, and the creation of a coalition politics based on these understandings—understandings that acknowledge the existence of oppression, even though its is not fashionable to say so" (Haywood & Drake, 1997, p. 3).

CHAPTER V

QUEERING FEMINIST SATIRE

Satire is almost always political, or at least entertaining a sect of politics. In the early tradition of Juvenalian satire, the goal is to affect an improvement of the object held up for mockery; satire is a “moral form and rhetorical device” (Griffin, 1994, p. 2). But the strategy varies and with that the level of ridicule and political charge. There are other kinds of satire, such as the Horatian, also of the earlier traditions, which is more light-hearted, meant to “laugh men out of their follies,” with a sense of delicacy and nuance (p. 7). Juvenalian has the heightened moralist tone, attempting to “punish the guilty with shame and even deter them from further evil” (p. 26).

Chasity Belt’s “Cool Slut” music video walks the middle ground, between an attempt to elicit a laugh through more subtle, inclusive feminist social criticisms that are aimed at multiple audience types. The band’s form of satire elicits various modes of identification by using gaze and the position of viewer, dependent on identity, preexisting cultural knowledge²⁹ and representability. This chapter discovers various modes of how texts can position the viewer, a social semiotic concern, by providing an understanding of feminist satire, male gaze and queer readings. The “Cool Slut” music video has profound elements that pave the way for such a multifaceted analysis that reaches beyond itself and speaks for other mediums that conjures particular viewers in a multitude of ways.

²⁹ White describes “retrospectatorship” and characterizes with respect to memory. She writes that “each new textual encounter is shaped by what’s already ‘inside the viewer” (p. 197).

The band members in the music video perform in ways that animate women's coalition. Through satire, the video hosts provocative shots and gender stereotypes for the assumed female viewer to channel the male gaze and see it as a tool to exploit male characterization as the sexually fixated and ego-inflated spectator. In addition to the male gaze in image, the song itself acknowledges men on the sideline as it welcomes women to promiscuity in the face of their gaze. The song is a renunciation to outdated misogynistic conception of purity by way of reclamation. Riot Grrrl politics are appropriated to concede to both the silly and sincere. In these ways, through both the visual and the aural, the male gaze is flipped on its head to channel the Other's gaze, and the satirical use of the male gaze is recognized. The source of laughter, a smirk, a head nod in agreement, of identification centered on an awareness of the ever-present male gaze and its implications is perhaps the primary touchstone, or the most obvious construction of audience.

The video exercises feminist satire by developing interactive meanings³⁰ illustrated by the formation of in-groups and out-groups, but the process is remarkably complicated in the "Cool Slut" music video. A necessary facet of social semiotics and critical discourse analysis, but in many nonquantifiable studies, elaborates on shared perceptions. Wodak and Meyer (2009) explain that social actors "rely mainly upon collective frames of perceptions, called social representations." The authors state that these perceptions "form the link between the social system and the individual cognitive system, and perform the translation, homogenization and coordination between external requirements and subjective experience" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In this case, shared perceptions translate to feminist women, and I argue that shared

³⁰ In discussing social semiotics, Aiello and Parry (2019) defined interactive meanings by the relationship between text and viewer, or in this case, music video and viewer.

perceptions of the video extend to the lesbian viewer as well by different but similar means.

Perhaps the most fruitful observation of this chapter steps past the principle, or obvious, uses of feminist satire in the video to highlight lesbian spectatorship.

Within my argument is the subtlety of the video's feminist humor generating an inclusive space that benefits those who are not heterosexual women. Lesbian³¹ viewers of the "Cool Slut" music video pick up the video's satirical devices to identify with band members in terms of womanhood and the endorsement of gender equality, but lesbian viewers have an enlarged sense identification with band members via homosexual undertones of the group dynamic and character representations within a "femme paradigm."³² So, they see themselves on screen as women, identifying through gender and gender-based recognizable satire, but also see themselves in the potential of those band members being lesbian. Lesbian identification with on-screen representations form what I deem lesbian satire, largely articulated as "lesbian humor" or "lesbian jokes" in academic writing, but it also helps initiate lesbian desire. Thus, lesbian repurposing happens in two ways.

Apart from the notion of in-groups and out-groups resulting from the employment of feminist and lesbian satire, it also advances my argument which concerns the *desiring* female viewer, finding a thrill from the video's same sexually suggestive artistic choices used for

³¹ Because I discuss woman-centered, feminist satire, I refer to the lesbian gaze throughout the thesis and this chapter. However, that comes with limitations, aligning with Doty's (1993) sentiment. He uses the term "queer" because it encompasses a wide range of positions, defining it as "non- (anti-, contra-) straight" (p. 3). He notes that the term "marks a flexible space for the expression" (p.3). "Lesbian" adheres to a gender binary, while "queer" does not. I realize this but primarily refer to the lesbian viewer to further my argument on two fronts—discussing lesbian satire/representation and lesbian, or same-gender, desire. Although I focus on same-gender desire, viewers who identify as non-binary may identify as well.

³² White (1999) characterizes the femme paradigm based on characters, who are "veiled in a feminine display" and without the need for its invert companion—the butch, the other spectatorial position that takes up cross-gender identification (pp. 14-15).

satirical purposes. The same compositional elements and rhetorical devices that work to develop understanding among (lesbian) women, what might be called the “subtext,”³³ the pull on their sexuality, begging lesbian viewers to desire as well. Lesbian gaze is not completely reliant on insider knowledge because even those pictures that are aggressively heterosexual can be looked up on by lesbians as fantasy. Nevertheless, the subtext invites the lesbian view to gaze with sexual desire. In other words, identification with woman as woman and woman as lesbian promotes sexual desire. The video’s lesbianism exhibits identification and sexual desire as being inextricably linked. The “Cool Slut” music video could be considered a form of “queerbaiting,”³⁴ however, the presence of queer tension is covert insofar as its most palpable premise—a narrative that strategically uses the male gaze to encircle women through shared experience. Heterosexual women are who benefit most from surface level reading, but with a closer look, the potential for lesbian desire runs rampant. Satire facilitates this variability.

³³ Reading subtext is a means for queer people to identify with heteronormative media. A simple definition of “subtext” is same-gender romances that are “relationships only implied or perceived to be more than platonic” (Russo, 2013, p. 450). See Mark Lipton’s (2008) chapter titled “Queer readings of popular culture: Searching [to] out the subtext” in *Queer Youth Subcultures*. Lipton explains the various approaches to subtext by drawing from personal experience and through interviews with youth who identify as lesbian. Queer identity production occurs in three ways: first, it occurs when lesbian audience members seek to “alter the intended meaning of a text as a result of their personal agendas”; secondly, it occurs when engaging with “specific practices of negotiation,” like with a specific text or character; thirdly, it occurs when the reader becomes the role of “detective,” when the “readers insist their lesbian reading is directly embedded within the text by the author and their job is to find the hidden messages—meant only for them” (p. 168).

³⁴ In her article, Ng’s (2017) refers to queerbaiting as “situations where those officially associated with a media text court viewers interested in LGBT narratives—or become aware of such viewers—and encourage their interest in the media text without the text ever definitively confirming the nonheterosexuality of the relevant characters” (p. 2). Because the fan base of Chastity Belt is primarily women, because the video has revealing shots of the women’s bodies and because the fan base might be aware of the nonheteronormative sexualities of some of the band members, the term is considered. Nevertheless, I still argue that lesbian reading would be more uncommon than not. The video depicts close same-gender friendship during girlhood as a means for appropriation, discussed in the previous chapter, and perhaps less to elicit lesbian interpretation.

The assumption of the male gaze for the purposes of feminist satire, and only that, limits possibility as that assumption is blind to the video's queerness. The agency of a lesbian audience, more than anything else, is what I deduce in this chapter. My argument follows Hall's (1973/2007) encoding-decoding model, what pioneered polysemic reading of visual media, but more accurate and evolved is Fiske's (1986, 1992) descriptions of fandom, which acknowledges marginalized audiences members that *produce* meanings from media to meet their needs. According to Fiske's conception of fandom, the lines between production and consumption are almost indistinguishable. I articulate the possibilities that Fiske allows with his propositions, particularly in how they welcome lesbian readings to take place. I focus on the lesbian agency here, but because of interpretation is hardly limit, I must also account for the male viewer who can attach himself for sexual excitement. Although he might empathize, he never *identifies*—he has the option of altogether skating past the feminist ethos. To examine male voyeurism, I complicate Fiske's ideas of polysemic potential with the unwavering patriarchal social structures, which cannot be overlooked in a grounded analysis. I conclude with a reconciliation of these two viewpoints, of agency and audience arrest, arguing that the lesbian gaze always coexists with male voyeurism, especially within my specific context.

Section I

Presenting and Repurposing Feminist Satire

In this section, I focus on identification that takes place for women in general, meaning same-gender identification. To do this, I describe feminist satire, which is founded on shared values among feminists, and how it lends to the formation of in-groups and out-groups. I use examples from the video to illustrate this claim, tending to moments previously discussed. Knowledge of woman-centered, feminist in-group membership works to create lesbian in-group

membership. This is not to say that all women are lesbian, but that lesbianism is informed by same-gender desire among women. In a discussion of lesbian satire, I begin articulating how women's shared experience is the bedrock for the induced lesbian gaze discussed in the next section. I include interpretation of lesbian satire because the active lesbian gaze can be additionally understood through lesbian satire by way of the representations on screen which indicate same-gender desire among band members. Lesbian satire as a kind of invitation for the lesbian gaze but not a necessary backdrop. Lesbian satire works to simply reinforce the already present potential of lesbian desire, which is based on suggestive shots, not bound to woman's masculinized position, or a cross-gender identification. White (1999) sees masculinization as an abolishment of homoerotic subject/object interaction. She refuses the viewer's narcissism by motioning towards the "representability of desire as distinct from identification" (p. 16). However, the narrative must strike the lesbian audience member by first assuming a larger female audience, acknowledged by White who writes that "homosexuality is engendered within and against definitions of femininity" (p. 15).

Woman humorists have used humor for a variety of situations, as illustrated in Linda Morris' (1994) edited collection of critical essays on women's humor throughout history, but at the core women's humor relays back to the collective personal experience of women within a particular social structure. Morris dedicates a section to feminist humor specifically, where essayists explicate the ways in which feminists use humor to build a sense of community and rebel against oppression. For example, Linda Pershing's (1991/1994) essay analyzes the performance of explicitly feminist³⁵ comedian Kate Clinton, highlighting the crucial aspect of

³⁵ Pershing notes that claiming feminism is unusual in comedy, even among women comedians. She notes that women have been the targets of men's *and* women's humor. Chastity Belt's music and image is overtly feminist by way of reading, but also as stated in interviews.

gender to both performer and audience. Pershing uses an excerpt from *Ms.* magazine to say that her humor is “directed to a particular audience of women who can share, or at least sympathize with, her worldview without being alienated or offended, her jokes are gender-specific” (p. 403). Encouraging “a sense of common identity and group cohesion with and among the audience” is one of many functions of humor, and a focus of this section, but Pershing states that the most important is Clinton’s as a “tool of subversion and transformation” because of its critique of male dominance (p. 413). Pershing, among the whole of essayists in the Morris’ collection, and many other scholars of feminist humor echo these sentiments.

Satire is a useful device in feminist discourse in that it serves to subvert hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, feminist satire is not the opposite of men’s humor nor about them, at least explicitly. Feminist satire only “demonstrates that *culturally* we have not been doing what the male does” (Kaufman, 1980/1994, p. 27). Kaufman writes about how satire, more than humor, often relies on stereotypes but notes that feminist works usually avoid such.³⁶ The inclination to avoid stereotyped characters “arises from a subculture that has no patience with stereotyping, especially in relation to sex roles” (p. 25). For instance, they need not, and in many cases, have not invented male stereotypes—they can simply quote verbatim the words of a real male figure to get the point across. However, a common way to deconstruct gender roles is the use of stereotypes or satirized behaviors. Indirect techniques are seen in the video, which is absent of men entirely but works from words typically used by men to degrade women via the lyrics, stereotyped behavior of women/girls and the construction of the male audience through the camera lens.

³⁶ In the previous chapter, I dedicate a section to describing the gender stereotypes presented on screen. In my discussion, I write as if there are stereotyped characters, but mention that there are contradictory behaviors, indicating that *actions* are stereotyped, not the individual.

Women's humor,³⁷ an umbrella term for the subset on which I focus—satire, has a special place in comedy because of its inherent rebellion in a male-dominated field and an inescapable attention to social dynamics, alluding to the notion of personal as political. Women's use of satire can never escape its proximity to social structures because women who tell the joke and satirize their place in the world often refuse their place in those oppressive structures. Bing (2004) lists various functions of humor in general—maintaining or subverting a hierarchy, establishing an in-group and reinforcing boundaries and stereotypes, but tugs at the inherently subversive nature of feminists wielding humor. More poignantly, feminist satire serves as a means of survival for women. Kaufman (1980/1994) concludes her essay “Pulling Our Own Strings” with this:

The world is always humor-poor. There is never enough of it. Yet, without humor we cannot survive. Our world is too relentlessly cruel, too callous, too uncivilized, and feminists who contemplate it will die of depression or lapse into cynicism and inaction without our humor. By joking, we remake ourselves so that after each disappointment we become once again capable of living and loving. (p. 32)

This is perhaps the fundamental reason for studying this music video—because of its subversive characteristics, and more specifically, its core identity as a tool to persevere through a world that oppresses women of all kinds, including the lesbian, the queer.

³⁷ Although my focus is satire, most academics who write about women's satire are largely concerned with the broader humor. This causes my tendency to use the words interchangeably. To affirm this connection further, I argue the feminist satire in the video is a humorous one for those who understand the humor.

Inclusive Feminist Satire

Bing defines what she calls a “feminist joke” – that I am calling feminist satire – by listing several characteristics and *excluding* jokes that ridicule the out-group. She notes that inclusive feminist humor is subversive in and of itself. What connotes feminist humor at first glance from the perspective of someone who does not identify with feminist ideas, who is not a woman or who is not marginalized in some way might be different than that of who does identify with transgressive thought. From those on the “outside,” feminist humor might suggest the ridicule of men, but Bing (2004) argues that feminist humor is a celebration of the female experience, not centered on male oppression. Effective feminist humor is inclusive, not divisive. The feminist satire in the music video is indeed more inclusive. Because the video’s satire purposefully succeeds in The Bechdel Test³⁸ by way of lyrics and imagery, perhaps abstractly. The video avoids direct criticism of men, which allows men to join and understand the female experience. Because men are not disparaged with the band’s humor, they can sympathize without agitation. This is not to say that voyeuristic potential does not exist—men can read the video without regard for its inclusive statement. Julia Shapiro, the lead singer, sings only inadvertently refers to men. Men are not mentioned in the song, although the lyrics reclaims the word “slut,”³⁹ a misogynist pejorative. The visuals pull both men and women, maybe for different reasons, but maybe they are the same if based on empathy (or homosexual desire).

³⁸ The Bechdel Test is from a comic strip from Allison Bechdel’s 1985 comic titled *Dykes to Watch Out For*, where one woman explains that she has three criterion that she abides by when seeing a movie: one of which is having at least one conversation between two women about something other than a man or men. I discuss the efficacy of feminist jokes when they are inclusive to men and lesbian women/lesbians, who both benefit from jokes not explicitly targeting men. This echoes the test but within the context of humor. In addition, O’Meara (2016) problematizes the feminism underlying the test by noting its growth in popularity as a silencing of women.

³⁹ See Attwood’s (2007) article on Riot Grrrls’ reclaiming the word slut and sexual agency.

More effective feminism seeks allies, not enemies. Politically sound feminism does not wish to rigidly uphold binaries. Feminism breaks them down. Although the feminist satire is playful and meanings are perpetually negotiated because of ephemeral moments packed with a self-awareness, it is acute, hardly allowing for misunderstanding. Even in other songs from earlier discography that visualize a man as a satirical device and what might be considered more overtly feminist, have an inviting charm, absent of totalizing derision. Although men are not as adept at getting the joke because of an inevitable weakness in the identification process, the subtleties create a reservoir of pedagogy⁴⁰ for those who tag along and wrangle with empathy. In a quantitative study, satire which comments on gender equality “motivates collective action in women *and* men with a weaker feminist identity” (Riquelme, Carratero-Dios, Megías, & Romero-Sánchez, 2021, p.1; emphasis added). Most central to my argument is that feminist satire works from a place of inclusivity are also more relatable to non-heteronormative [read: lesbian] women. Although Chastity Belt is white, an attribute that makes difficult some ultimate form of inclusivity, the video’s satire collapses and makes distinct possible interpretation. They do not have to labor hard to bend the text to their will. Bing (2004) writes that jokes that “disparage men may help establish a sense of solidarity among *heterosexual* women because of a presumed sense of shared experience” (p. 24; emphasis added). A significant part of my argument recognizes that the suggestive compositional elements, that remind the viewer of the male gaze, open the door for the video to be interpreted as a lesbian satire.

In-groups and Out-groups

⁴⁰ See Rossing (2016) for a discussion on racial humor as a critical pedagogical tool that undermines White hegemony.

One function of feminist satire is forming in-groups and out-groups, which relies on the speaker's intention of an amusing joke perceived amusing by some audience (Bing, 2004). I argue that feminist satire is subversive, not only in how it counters hegemonic perspectives of women, but also in how it disturbs the formation of in-groups and out-groups. Satire helps to establish solidarity among women, but it also establishes social stereotypes, writing the rules for what men and women can and cannot do (Bing, 2004). Therefore, an inclusive feminist satire is important. Through articulating how in-groups and out-groups are established I can illustrate how lesbians, are problematically left out. They are left to create their own satire, what is camouflaged by hegemonic heterosexuality. Intersectionality is a key perspective in current feminist theory, including an acknowledgement of the queer. Bing (1994) understands the overlap in feminists and lesbians, their politics and their respective humor, but differentiates the two for her analysis. I will do the same. Satire helps to establish solidarity among women, but it also establishes social stereotypes, writing the rules for what men and women can and cannot do (Bing, 2004). Bing (1994) understands the overlap in feminists and lesbians, their politics and their respective humor and satire, but differentiates the two for her analysis. I will do the same.

Because feminist satire underpins the music video, the analysis calls on an investigation directed at unraveling the elements that make it so and moreover, what makes it a *lesbian* one. To examine the role of feminist satire in the video, how it creates a meaningful alternative to heteronormative spectatorship, it is first defined by specific applications in the video and how that constitutes the in-group. To help elucidate the lesbian gaze described in the next section, I also describe a variation of feminist satire, what Bing (2004) calls the "lesbian joke" by using examples pulled from the video. Lesbian humor consists of jokes that "successfully challenge and undermine attempts by the straight community to define lesbians" (Bing, 2004, p. 22).

Through acknowledging lesbian satire, the formation of in-groups and out-groups is made more ambiguous than what “in” and “out” would originally imply.

Most helpful in articulating in-groups and out-groups is Linda Hutcheon’s (1994) *Irony’s Edge*, which looks at this function in more detail. I use Hutcheon’s insights because irony and satire operate in similar ways, although the two are not synonymous. Where she uses irony, I supplant with satire to explain the dynamics between the music video’s interpreter and what Hutcheon calls the “ironist,” or the one who “intends to set up an ironic relation between the said and the unsaid but may not always succeed in communicating that intention (or the relation)” (p. 11). The exact intention is less important here,⁴¹ as it is unknowable unless the band is consulted, and because meanings that women gather from the video, which constitute the productive gaze, is of most concern. Regardless, communication is a complex process and is why Hutcheon calls ironic communication a “miracle” and the “mode of the unsaid.” Satire is similar in this way. Those that enact satire run off the expectation that a particular group of people will get their performance, like Chastity Belt might expect viewers to be inclined to feminism. Hutcheon writes, “What is true of irony is true of all communication, in other words: comprehension is a complex process (even if most people take that complexity for granted the greater part of the time), a process fraught with difficulties” (p. 85). There are always going to be problems with any form of irony or its cousin, satire, no matter how overtly political or feminist it is. There is nothing intrinsically subversive about satire, which is why participants and its perception, or lack thereof, matters.

⁴¹ Hutcheon reflects on her “nervousness” on ever pondering on some intentionality, but for satire, this is needed.

Hutcheon (2004) examines irony as a political issue, which looks at “scene” of irony rather than an “isolated” trope in the formalist sense. This contributes to her verbiage when discussing the supposed hierarchy or reified gender roles that Bing (2004) describes. Hutcheon problematizes the terms “in-group” and “out-group,” what is a hierarchy, because the interpreter can see these power relations much differently. She replaces these terms with “discursive communities”:

It is not so much that irony *creates* communities or in-groups; instead, I want to argue that irony happens because what could be called “discursive communities” already exist and provide the context for both the deployment and attribution of irony. We all belong simultaneously to many such communities of discourse, and each of these has its own restrictive (Hagen 1992: 155) but also *enabling* communication conventions. (p. 17; emphasis in original)

Hutcheon’s interpretations are acutely aware of audiences like lesbians, who could be considered an out-group. More than the shared experience of women, who can still find themselves in and of homophobic mass culture, lesbian humor [read: satire] relies on lesbian shared experience and “affirms the values, beliefs and politics of the in-group” (Bing & Heller, 2003, p. 158). The discursive communities that Hutcheon articulates, communities that are not fixed but are part of an ever-evolving social activity, relate to the lesbian “imagined community” preserved by “shared stock of stories and myths” (Bing & Heller, 2003, p. 158). The use of imagination comes from the circumstance of lesbians needing to *construct* a sense of belonging, which in some cases uses subtext materials. Like Fiske (1986) posits, marginalized interpreters must create to suit their needs, whether that is a critique of the *perceived* feminism presented, or a reading

against the grain with an oppositional gaze.⁴² A supposed alignment of the video's composition with audience perspective does not constitute an "in-group," as implied by writings on satire, which do not account for ran inclusivity. But even if feminist satire is inclusive, or what is to "relate and relativize" in the words of Hutcheon, satire is a complicated process of communication.

Satire for the feminist. The combination of video aesthetics, song and performance serve as group-building mechanism. I return to the some of the elements I have described in previous chapters that women understand as a social criticism targeting a sexually objectifying industry and men who repudiate women's sexual desire, wrapped up in the zany performances that use exaggeration, appropriation and juxtaposition. These take the form of appropriating girlhood, emphasized through a reference to the '90s era, using gender stereotypes and juxtaposing image with song. Moments that overtly evoke the male gaze are a feminist decision as well, and it is an instrument that grabs hold of the woman viewer,⁴³ further ringing her into the joke.

⁴² See hooks' (1992) essay on oppositional reading, in which she describes the silenced Black female spectator. She argues that the Black gaze on media is an act of resistance in and of itself because the gaze has been aggressively prohibited historically, especially for Black women. While dominant representations of a binary pervade media, audience members can change the surrounding discourse through interrogation.

⁴³ White (1999) critiques the masculinization of the viewer in her book, but only because scholars have used that as a preface to lesbian desire.



Figure 5.1. Gretchen Grimm, the drummer, looks at the camera and smirks while dropping of a library book.

Satire masculinizes the women viewer, so that she sees through the male's eyes, who see her. Band members reel him in to address his treatment, or the society who molds him to treat women in such a way. The male is sexually teased through revealing shots of the band members' dissected body, but there is a balance that manifests in two ways: with scenes where the band member looks at the viewer with facial expressions that appear to recognize the male viewer who also patronizes. As discussed in the previous chapter, a scene with Gretchen Grimm, the drummer, illustrates the male gaze—Grimm drops off a book at the library and smirks at the camera. The scenes communicate self-conscious women who realizes intelligence is seen as uncommon among women, against men who revel in their own intelligence. This scene communicates a typed character. All band members have a typed character and look directly at the viewer. Other examples of this phenomenon crop up in the video as well that I will not reiterate here.

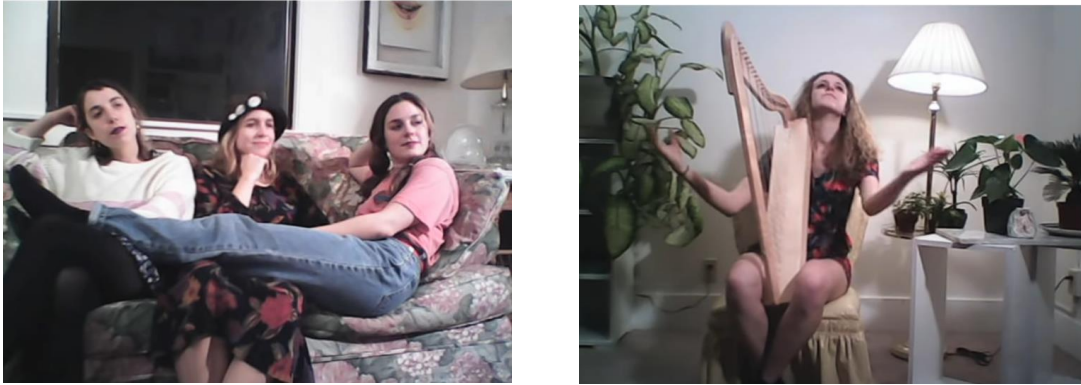


Figure 5.2. Band members watch in awe, such as Lydia Lund, a guitarist, with her hand to her chin while Julia Shapiro, the singer, fans out her arms to play the harp dramatically.

There is also a kind of mimicry of men, a satirical device, that happens within the group dynamic itself, i.e., when band members sit on the couch to watch Shapiro play instruments and when band members watch Grimm dance. Band members watch in awe—Lydia Lund looks to Shapiro with her hand to her chin while Shapiro fans out her arms to play the harp dramatically, referencing a sexualized star-of-the-show convention. Grimm gyrates her hips for other band members who excitedly watch from the couch. Grimm’s dance scene stands as a recognition of girls’ attempts to soon romance a boy with masterful dance moves, but they also do not necessarily have to have a man in mind. The scene could simply be a simple, fun act if read with feminist criticism but still aware of girlhood solidarity.

Because of this back-and-forth tension when male gaze is used, the video appears to be meta, cautious of varying feminist readings but all in the vein of satire. The video is reflexive in the sense that it acknowledges that components that it attempts to align with different strands of feminism, realizing that not all women have the same feminist philosophy and humor. The lyrics

agree with a sex-positive postfeminist⁴⁴ sensibility, however, the visual blends two lines of thought together. For one, the lyrics bleed into the image with an openness to sexuality. Shapiro sings “To all the girls in the world / Trying to take of their shirts / It’s okay to be slutty” (Chasity Belt, 2015). Yet, the song does not completely beget the opposition to sexual promiscuity, such as what the more puritanical second wave presumes, with anti-pornography campaigns from seminal feminists like Catherine Mackinnon.⁴⁵ I consider the rest of the album, songs and cover, as well as the song’s lyrics more closely to allow for a different interpretation, one that views the song as introspective, commenting on one’s own promiscuous, demeaning behavior.⁴⁶ The tension of embracing of sexuality, even at a young age, and its oppositional view that wants to preserve the innocence of girlhood and friendship echoes sentiments of inclusivity in the ways that the tension can cater to different feminist philosophies. The video holds the potential for

⁴⁴ Postfeminism is uplifted, problematized and continuously redefined across feminist and queer theory, implying feminism as a dialectic. For instance, in Sonnet’s article on women-authored erotica fiction she defines a collection of novels through a lens that critiques its postfeminist sensibilities. In her article, she defines postfeminism more as an end of feminism rather than a site of feminist politics. Because of arguments about its meaning, Gill (2007) views it as a sensibility made of interrelated themes.

⁴⁵ In her essay “Sexuality,” Mackinnon (1989/2008) critiques sexual objectification of women at length. Contrary to the feminism in the video, which can be interpreted as overtly owning sexuality, MacKinnon recognizes sexuality as a social construct. She argues that “sexual meaning is not made only, or even primarily, by words and in texts. It is made in social relations of power in the world, through which process gender is also produced” (p. 205). The other interpretation that I touch on is the satire that views girls educating each other on acceptable sexual behaviors with a kind of sadness, tying in with MacKinnon’s broader discourse on power.

⁴⁶ In the previous chapter, I discuss the different implications of the song’s first two stanzas: “We’re just a couple of sluts / “Going around on the town / Fooling around / Getting all dressed up / Just to dress back down.” I note these stanzas could be self-referential to one’s own degrading behavior, or the acknowledgment of men who essentialize women down to their sexuality. I also explain the context of the song and video, which accounts for the entirety of the song’s album *Time to Go Home*’s, its overall tone and narrative. Within that explanation, I cite feelings of doubt that threads all the songs together—doubt around losing oneself in men, sexual or otherwise. Moreover, the video primarily uplifts tight bonds among girls, which does pertain to men in some of the scenes, such as when the girls are educating one another on how to dance for a potential suiter.

differing viewer positions. Representations are both naturally ephemeral and ambiguous because of the medium, as noted by Vernallis (2004), but also strategically ambiguous—a loaded term.⁴⁷

I argue that this is a result of inclusive feminist satire.

The juxtaposition of the song and video, the video being set in the '90s era, could indicate an awareness of the dichotomy of a commercialized, postfeminist idea found in glitzy and glam Girl Power and the angry, gritty Riot Grrrl's stance on lifting women up from an *ongoing* oppressive state. However, in the previous chapter that draws from the video's semiotic resources for analysis, I convey an ambiguity or a "contrived girlhood," which intends to be subversive. If representations are subversive, the band wants to empower girls soon to be in and of society, doing so through transposing the video within the era of the Girl Power, or less commercialized, but the still very white and middle-class Riot Grrrl movement.⁴⁸ Wald's (1998) article articulates how girlhood appropriation in the '90s may be more problematic, perpetuating the ills that they are trying to address, or ignore altogether.⁴⁹ But when appropriating from an earlier era, Chastity Belt ignores the current context, which has its own problems. Anita Harris (2003) states that "young women's fortunes are seen as intricately interwoven with late

⁴⁷ Strategic ambiguity is viewed through different lenses. In their article about organizational communication, Paul and Strbiak (1997) note the normative conception of clear communication being the most ideal and most ethically sound but argue that strategic ambiguity a valuable tactic, which can be ethical, in particular circumstances. Contrarily, albeit in different academic backgrounds, scholars like Ralina Joseph view strategic ambiguity as a postracial ideology.

⁴⁸ Anita Harris' (2003) notion the "can-do" girl versus the "at-risk" girl can be seen in the example of the Spice Girls at one end and bands like Bikini Kill on the other.

⁴⁹ See Wald's (1998) article that differentiates the Spice Girls from Riot Grrrl bands. She uses Gwen Stefani's "Just a Girl" to articulate a contradiction: "the strategy of appropriating girlhood, like the word girl itself, signifies ambiguously: as a mode of culturally voiced resistance to patriarchal femininity; as a token of a sort of "gestural feminism" that is complicit with the trivialization, marginalization, and eroticization of women within rock music cultures; and as an expression of postmodern "gender trouble" that potentially recuperates girlhood in universal, ethnocentric terms" (p. 588). She notes that the instability of Stefani's girlhood appropriation lends itself to a less optimistic reading than the song implies.

modernity, the fortunes of late modernity are equally interwoven with young women” (p. 17).

New characterizations of girlhood “suggests that what it means to prevail or lose out in these new times has become bound up with how we understand girlhood” (Harris, 2003, p. 17).

Chastity Belt strategically escapes neoliberalism’s individualistic definitions of success, which might be why they aestheticize and commodify ‘90s girls’ coalition. Members do not radiate “girl boss energy” through career seeking, but rather are empowered through lifting one another up.

Feminist ethos in the video is almost unavoidable for the viewer, but women are not a homogenous group, and this examination reinforces this, problematizing a definitive singular in-group and out-group, creating several—whether it’s the feminist who considers these totally empowering, or one who also recognizes an integrated problematic representation. The feminist agenda of the video, influenced by social position like race and class, influences interpretation. When considering the whiteness of the video and the whiteness of all girl-based (music-facilitated)⁵⁰ movements, people of color are excluded from this feminism and are made to produce by interpreting something more relatable. Middle-class imagery is seen throughout the video, which separates those who cannot afford those props, but at the same time, the appropriation of girlhood can be seen to cross over into recognizing middle-class socioeconomic status of those who participate in the ‘90s movements. Once again, the video strategizes ambiguity, perhaps through reflexivity, which allows for a wider path of identification. For different reasons but through a similar process, lesbian viewers produce by interpreting queer subtext in the video.

⁵⁰ An emphasis on transformative girlhood and Girl Power can be seen in other media as well, such as sitcoms.

Satire for the lesbian. I reemphasize the known consequence of using lesbian rather than queer. However, I must also account for the importance of acknowledging the relationship between gender and sexuality. In her article “Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias,” Martin (1994) observes that queer theory has come to ignore its foundations to make “queer sexualities become figural, performative, playful and fun” often at the expense of the female body (p. 104). A similar perspective, based on a skepticism about an amorphous queer theory, notes that queer theory is largely seen as a progressive response to “a certain kind of feminist and lesbian theorizing that is now deemed hopelessly retro, boring, realist, modernist, about shoring up identity, rather than its deconstruction” (Walters, 1996, p. 842). Walters deems this is a dogmatic perspective and one that weakens attempts to empower based on identity, a “dethroning of gender” (p. 842). With this being said, I continue to use the word “lesbian” for this section, because it will allow me to organize satirical expressions based on in-group interpretations of the video, and because lesbian remains to be a valid identity, although not determinant one.⁵¹

When defining lesbian humor, one cannot forget that lesbian humor “often concentrates on the shared experience of women” (Bing, 2004, p. 32). Gender is among many cultural factors that influence audience position (Doty, 1993). Doty notes that many people, especially those who have gay and lesbian specific sexualities, “find it next to impossible to articulate sexual identity without some reference to gender” and must “involve some degree of same-gender identification and desire” (p. 5). Lesbian satire does not neglect the shared experiences of woman. However, lesbian satire is a unique phenomenon. Queen (2005) writes that the “lesbian subject is by no

⁵¹In their article on lesbian humor, Bing and Heller’s (2003) define lesbian by recognizing ambivalence in the term, calling it useful but also limiting due to its external construction.

means unique in this simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, but she is unique in the degree to which she is systematically rendered invisible and inaudible” (p. 241). Both queerness and humor exist in liminal spaces, “between categories and outside of normative constraints” (Klein, 2015, p. 697). To translate to this study’s context, the music video’s satire, that which is read as lesbian, is shrouded. In her 2015 lecture titled “Queer Use,” Sarah Ahmed said, “To queer use might be to make use audible, to listen to use; to bring to the front what ordinarily recedes into the background.” Lesbian viewers read into and create from the narrow spaces with what is not obviously there to the heteronormative audience.

I argue that the male gaze that is evoked in the video to elicit a feminist interpretation translates to the lesbian, but with a privileged perception that heterosexual women cannot have. When the lesbian reads the group dynamic, i.e., the performances in the video that address the male gaze but between the band members on screen, not between band members and the viewer with voyeuristic camera work, the video’s satire takes on different meanings. Once the lesbian viewer notes the group dynamic, with already having a background knowledge of queer members,⁵² lesbians can see that Chastity Belt complicates how lesbians are defined⁵³ through the video’s surface-level heteronormativity. This falls in line with lesbian humor deriving from the “blurriness of sexual scripts, and anxieties produced by the instability of identity categories that we rely on to simplify human sexuality and classify persons as ‘gay,’ ‘bisexual,’ or ‘straight’” (Bing & Heller, 2003, p. 163). Like any form of humor, amusement depends on

⁵² Annie Truscott, the bassist, is currently in a relationship with Jay Som, the stage name of Melina Duterte. Stacy Peck, who is in Childbirth with Chasity Belt’s lead singer Julia Shapiro, is in a relationship with Truscott’s sister. I have gathered this information by perusing their Instagram accounts, which are public.

⁵³ Recall Bing’s (2004) definition of a lesbian humor: jokes that “successfully challenge and undermine attempts by the straight community to define lesbians” (p. 22).

familiarity with culture, history and community (Bing & Heller, 2003). The fun comes from knowing this queer subtext as a clandestine for of humor—lesbians of an in-group can uniquely read group dynamics, which is emphasized with that outside knowledge.

The music video shows a multi-layered use of the male gaze in several instances using a jump shot from lone band member to the other band members watching her. I argue that these examples illustrate a form of lesbian satire, but also that they help facilitate the lesbian gaze, which is explored in the next section. The example that I use here is when Shapiro, the lead singer, is sitting in a chair in the living room, immersed in playing her clarinet as well as harp, pictured above. She is wearing an elegant, shorter dress and fancy shoe. In an earlier scene, one that does not cut to the other band members sitting on the couch watching Shapiro, Shapiro is wearing boyish, street clothes—pants, a long-sleeved shirt, sneakers and a bucket hat that covers up her long hair. In that scene, she plays the keyboard whimsically. The only scene that stars Shapiro but who is revealed to be playing for her group of friends, her outfit dress is more suggestive, at least for the '90s, and she plays maturely with a finesse of a seasoned musician. This example has already been described within a feminist paradigm, but it takes on new meanings when considering a subtext of homosexual tension, as it regards to the redefining of lesbian representation using stereotypes, honing Shapiro's sensitive singer-songwriter type. However, stereotypes are continuously broken down through the video as to communicate a reflexivity, which can be appreciate by women of all sexualities.

Through the reading of subtext, lesbians viewers see lesbianism getting redefined through femme presentation. White (1999) notes that "lesbian visibility is veiled in the feminine display that is the cinema's primary dream language rather than embodied in the cross-gender identification offered by the invert or the butch," which she notes is indeed a valid spectatorial

position” (p. 14). Because cinema and music video can be viewed as a similar media form, I use White’s observations in the “Cool Slut” context. It can be argued that the veil is especially thick in a video that intentionally uses feminine gender stereotypes, but I see feminine stereotypes attempting to remove the sapphic veil. The direct address to stereotypes is a both a criticism on society’s view of women—a profitable choice to use in cinema—but also a neutral comment on the veil that provides an outlet for lesbian interpretations of satire. I use the word neutral because femininity is a “dream language,” a flexible instrument to excite various forms of sexuality, discussed in the next section.

Because there is inevitable overlap due to identification as woman, lesbians are in on the base layer of the joke aimed at patriarchal dynamics—jokes among women, possibly all heterosexual women, are not exclusive to heterosexual women. I also argue, in contrast to Bing (2004) who articulates lesbian humor hyper-specifically, that lesbian humor has more of an overlap with heterosexual woman than imagined due to the identification that takes place as woman. To see lesbians as inherently subversive, in this context of satire, is an Othering mechanism. When feminist satire is acknowledged and within that the nuance of lesbian satire because of the gender stereotypes, only after reading lesbian subtext, the analysis is more comprehensive. Like heterosexual women, lesbians are affected by misogyny, both apt to criticize and succumbing to internalize it, like Foucault’s panopticon.

Section II

A Lesbian’s Fantasy

She must reconstruct an identity from a sexual space in between, fused by shame, secrecy and pleasure.

—Cherry Smyth, *The Transgressive Sexual Subject*

Lesbian audience members read lesbian satire and perhaps feminist satire but take it a step further to emphasize on the parts that lend themselves to her desire. Within the context of the “Cool Slut” video, desire is related to satire in the ways the in-groups and out-groups are reworked and redefined by one’s interpretation of structural components that are used to provide feminist and lesbians with a laugh. Patricia White’s (1999) *Uninvited* is founded upon “legacy of absence.” She cites Freud and Foucault to say that they “have taught us that what is actively prohibited can nevertheless be inferred from its discursive effects” (p. 1). Like lesbian satire, lesbian desire finds its way through the cracks created in subtext; it is a tool of belonging when representation is absent, when only suggestive and symbolic “representability” can be found. Lesbian representability welcomes the lesbian viewer to enjoy a text however they wish because the women on screen enjoy one another in the same way. The lesbian determines the presence of a sexual tension between women in the video, as described in the section on lesbian satire, which provides a kind of warm homecoming. It is an embrace of the lesbian viewers sexuality and presence in the audience, who can recognize both the dominant and subtextual messages. The band members welcome a “to-be-looked-at-ness” for the lesbian through shots that evoke the male gaze, which does not hinge on fetishizing the thick potential for girl-on-girl. Rather, they center and dissect the female body, evoke the lesbian gaze too. These perceptions work together.

Lesbians can invade a space as well, but part of my argument realizes that lesbian spectatorship is different from male voyeurism, or the males inhabiting the subject position of the lesbian viewer. I consider it less problematic because he has never been in the Other’s place. Men are not subject to a society that objectifies them to the same extent. Lesbians, who are women or who identify as women, identify with the objectification of their bodies in media. Sexuality does not determine that, nor does how butch or femme a lesbian is. These facets of

identity do not negate the already existent identification that comes from gender. I use White's (1999) femme paradigm for the purpose of lesbian satire, specific to the self-defining function, how femme subverts dominant conceptions of lesbians as butch simply because men like women too. I also choose the femme paradigm because it consists of what White calls a "dream language" (p. 14). In this paradigm of films, the sexually objectified female body is served to pander to the male viewer, but the lesbian indulges as well. With a measurable, noticeable femininity of woman comes a potentially unwanted male gaze, unless the sex positivity of the song's lyrics and straight reading of the video's suggestive scenes want him to look, for either excitement or a pedagogy. Through a femme representation, males can attach more easily. White (1999) notes that the lesbian spectator is the "always-hanging-around-spectator," but in this case I argue that men are the hanging-around spectators. The video is different in that pandering is not overtly directed at the male. In fact, lesbian viewership is more at the fore in the video's creative imagination.

Chastity Belt's "Cool Slut" music video uses the male gaze, channeled through viewer/object interaction and on-screen group dynamics, to create solidarity among women, hetero- and homosexual, but invariably there is the lesbian sexual fantasy built from the imagined eroticism of the video. I do not rely on lesbian satire in my argument to see the lesbian gaze, but I do see identification and lesbian desire as co-occurring phenomena in this context that strategically uses in-group identification. The lesbian gaze is not contingent on the ambivalent in-group and out-groups that are formed, but because she sees lesbian representation, or the less definitive notion of White's representability, her desire strengthens. Representability is a flag that waves to the lesbian, locking her sights. I agree with Kabir's (1998) perspective, which is that "if we relinquish the impulse to want to control the other, and we instead see the other in a

mutual dialogue with the self, we will be able to reduce objectification and increase engagement” (p. 19). The lesbian viewer is no longer an ostracized audience member, flying under the radar due to the hegemonic heteronormativity that defines society’s faculties. This includes all media industries that know revealing shots of feminine women sell to the larger white heterosexual male audience member, despite the content that derives from artists’ own social positions.

Lesbian Desire

White (1999) problematizes the arguments of many scholars who theorize on lesbian spectatorship. Most prevalently, White argues on the basis that it is because of the representability of femme films which prevent identification. She calls Andrea Weiss’ claim an “imprecise” one, who states that “lesbianism takes the form of female identification,” to argue that “it is the representability of desire as distinct from identification that distinguishes what I am calling femme films from women’s films” (White, 1999, p. 16, citing Weiss, 1991). White defines “women’s films” as those that “represent and appeal to female subjectivity” (p. 2). White calls lesbians who see themselves on screen a “narcissistic overidentification” (p. 214). While this is pathologizing, she also writes that she finds female spectatorship to figure the lesbian and makes them unique is through “the play of sameness and difference, original and copy, a superimposition of the spectator on the spectacle” (p. 214). The lesbian can automatically identify with Chastity Belt members because they are women, like her, who feel the feminist message of the video. The video is meant to appeal to all women who advocate for a gender equality and appreciate the humorous means to do so.

In *The Subject of Semiotics*, Kaja Silverman (1983) examines female subjectivity and suture, through the lens of semiotics—signs and their significations. She writes that “shot relationships” or “suture,” one of many organizational elements is what makes meanings emerge

and constructs the subject-position for the viewer (p. 201). Like the attention necessary for a social semiotic approach, White (1999) writes that visual coding in the femme paradigm is determined through “point of view structures, composition, costume, and aspects of performance more generally” (White, 1999, p. 6). She also writes that types of persons are not part of the femme paradigm because it is the representability that allows for lesbian desire. Because lesbian desire is not tied to my analysis of feminist and lesbian satire, in which I discuss the video’s use of gender stereotypes for multiple purposes, I use the structures that White highlights to observe lesbian representability which evokes the lesbian gaze, supplemented by details from Vernallis’ (2004) book on music video analysis.

The heterosexual woman presumes a play on the male gaze and only that, unless she places herself in two worlds. The lesbian notices her body closely; to her, the curves are pronounced. She sees connects with Grimm more intensely. She sees herself reworked according to the inverse of society’s preconceptions on lesbian presentation. She also sees who she desires. Band members are presented in a way that appeals to lesbian eroticism, in part because the male gaze and lesbian gaze overlap but are also differentiated, working together to permit lesbian desire and deter male gaze. For example, in one scene the gaze is inverted, creating suture. Viewers see Grimm dance alone in the shot, full body. Grimm’ location in the room is the same one as Shapiro who played the clarinet and harp for her friends wearing a short dress, who is once alone in the shot and then the on-screen audience is shown. The sexual undertones are transposed from one band member to another through their location in the living room. The location where Shapiro sits and Grimm stands allows the viewer to reflect on a sexuality, satirically called on, but also one that appeals to the lesbian viewer who longs for the female body.

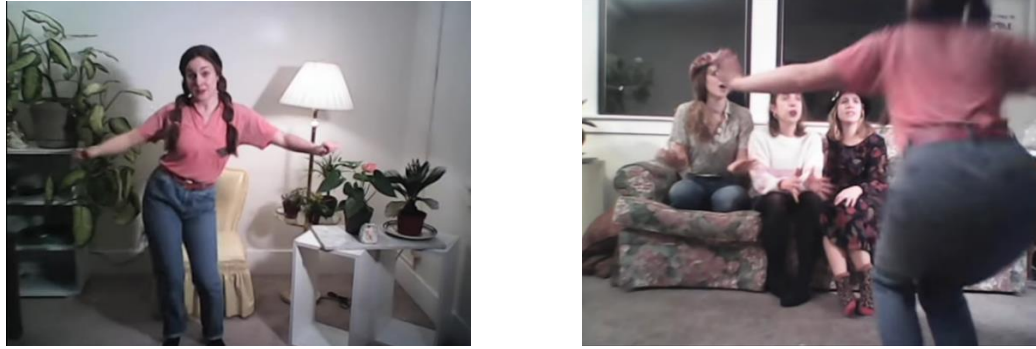


Figure 5.3. Gretchen Grimm shakes her hips for her ‘friends,’ teaching them how to move their body for potential love interests.

After the full body shot, the viewer then sees Grimm’s backside as she dances for her friends. The stretch of lower back to feet is the only part of her body that the viewer can see. Grimm is bent over. In this shot of Grimm’s backside, the lesbian viewer is acknowledged because the male viewer has already been acknowledged. Before this scene, of Grimm’s attention directed away from the camera, when Grimm dances and the camera shows her full body, the viewer does not yet know the context that involves her friends who sit on the couch watching her, learning from her. The juxtaposed shots, full body and the second of Grimm’s dissected body, work together in reverse temporality. The viewer sees the other band members only after Grimm dances alone. It is when the other band members are seen that the viewer recognizes who the dance is really for, if accounting the video’s feminist and lesbian satire.

Aside from the sexually suggestive shots, the band purposefully creates angles and body language that realizes man’s condescending perception of woman, like in Grimm’s library scene. I refer to the shots that play with his position of power, i.e., bird’s eye view as well as scenes that are shot from a ground-level angle with the band member towering over him. In the context of the video, I interpret the low angle operating less as creating a pedestal for the woman on screen and more as a mechanism that recognizes the hanging-around, surreptitious male spectator. This

camera technique further differentiates male viewership from lesbian viewership to problematize the men who are often targets of the visual, sexualized lure in other music videos. It is as if the video looks to the lesbian in the sexually suggestive shots and saves these low and high angle shots for the men as a discreet criticism. However, the perceived intention of the band, how lesbian and male gazes are differentiated based on visual power plays, are inevitably overlooked by the heterosexual male profiting off the sexualized female object. He dips in feet in both frames as the unavoidable male voyeur.

The Unavoidable Male Voyeur

The music video evokes the male gaze via the same shots that the lesbian gaze is evoked. However, the potential and really, the inevitability of men who enjoy Chastity Belt's music and who watch the video will look in ways that the band do not intend to allow. White (1999) cites Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema" and other foundational texts, in which "the female form and the apparatus that produces it as lure are mastered by male fetishism," noting that the "female spectator is excluded from a position of desire in "male" movies, and in "women's films" she is thought to mimic her screen surrogates' woes" (p. xvi). White understandably writes her book because of this limitation, but I find it imperative that I include the male viewer, who does not "master" the lesbian lure in this context because of the video's overtly feminist appeal. But he who benefits perhaps unknowingly and perhaps intentionally, depending on the politics of the lyrics and image. Here, I write as if he invades and watches from afar, and I make use of Laura Mulvey and other writers on the male gaze to do so.

Mulvey (1975/1989) describes the male gaze as a "determining" one, which "projects its phantasy on to the female figure" (p. 62). He is active as the "bearer of look" and she is the passive object of his desiring glances. He is active because her "appearance has been coded for

strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’” (p. 62). While I have argued that the video offers a “to-be-looked-at-ness” for the lesbian viewer, the video inevitably does this for the heterosexual male viewer, who sexualizes the band members and who film historically prioritizes. Silverman (1983) notes that a relay of male glances towards the female subject conceals an enunciated sexual difference, assuaging the male viewer from an anxiety while strengthening the anxiety of the female viewer because of her passivity. Although I have conveyed the agency shown through the video’s feminist representations and the viewer’s sense of agency, feminist film theorists make it imperative that the sexual, oppressive differences are considered. They argue who the nature of the watched and the watching, always in favor of the heterosexual male. The shots that conjure lesbian desire conjure men’s as well, like the contours of her breasts and her backside. The shots that allude to male privilege, that are not necessarily sexually suggestive but see his position of power by other means, can be read in a way that does not align with intention. Their performative intelligence and boyishness for the sake of throwing of prescribed gender roles. The male overlooks the video’s feminist ethos, and he does not do this actively. He cannot ever get the full grasp because he cannot identify with female subjects. He they cannot ignore their own privilege to sidestep basking in it. Knowing the consequences, he still revels in it.

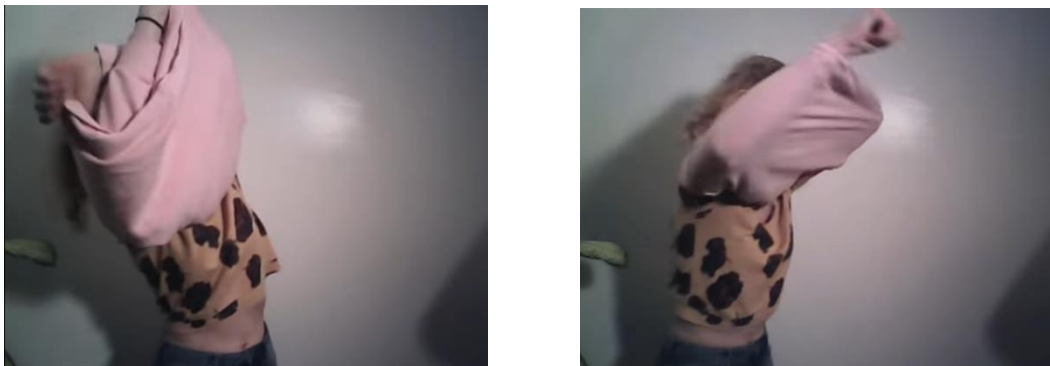


Figure 5.4. Close-up of Julia Shapiro struggling to take off her sweater. Her midriff is showing. The contour of her bra juts out from under her shirt.

Ellsworth, Kennard Larson and Selvin (1986) held an MTV viewing session to engage with the “issues of media reception, interpretation gendered spectatorship, and the social construction of pleasure” (p. 55). In these sessions, the scholars problematized pleasure to investigate the terms and conditions of pleasure elicited in the music videos. Selvin notices the striking discourse that hold male subjectivity in place, “a discourse of inevitability”—no matter what the discourse says, you will occupy your position of relative privilege and power, blind and destructive though it may be” (p. 61). Selvin’s in some way liberates male viewers from this position because of dogma but remains to recognize the thrust in structural positions. Heterosexual men cannot help but view the band members in a way that is not sexually objectifying. The video makers cannot prevent this from taking place.

Conclusion

Feminist and lesbian satire, like most satire, work to subvert the status quo. However, Mayne (2002) in *Cinema and Spectatorship* contends with the view that audiences are automatically resistant and notes that film studies is founded on a model of “resistant-versus-complicit readings,” which is limiting, reductive and lacks realistic ambivalence. Even with the rhetorical devices used in the satirical forms I have described speak to subversion, I account for a dialectic of agency and arrest. I look to scholars like Laura Mulvey who are less optimistic, who reckon with the patriarchal structure at large which overshadows any subversive attempt. Mulvey writes, “Women’s desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it” (p. 58). Mulvey’s comment defines woman’s inescapability of male spectatorship, which subjugates her. On the other end I consider Fiske’s (1992) scholarship, who speaks to the productive qualities of audiences, noting that “all

popular audiences engage in varying degrees of semiotic productivity, producing meanings and pleasures that pertain to their social situation out of the products of the culture industries” (p. 30). I also consider the scholarship of queer theorists like White who refuses the limiting view of Mulvey’s postulations on a woman’s deficiency. The narrative and subjects of the “Cool Slut” music video creates the potential of empowering women, of empowering the lesbian who resides in a more liminal, subterranean space, but the negotiation of meanings includes sexually objectifying instances, although intended to be tasteful satire.

This chapter’s examination speaks to critical facets of interactive meanings integral to the social semiotic approach and spectatorship as part of critical discourse analysis. I address a pervasive ambivalence in feminist representation which influences the efficacy of satire as well as the complicated, nonheteronormative spectatorship of the music video. Feminist representation and satire is always fraught with conflict. Each woman viewer will have her preference on feminist politics. But perhaps the most problematic issue that involves much of feminist theory is what Adrienne Rich calls “compulsory sexuality.” Rich (1980) observes that all feminists take as a basic assumption that the social relations between the sexes are disordered and extremely problematic, if not disabling, for women; all seek paths toward change,” but she argues that all of the feminist writings that she has encountered would have been “more accurate, more powerful, more truly a force for change, had the author felt impelled to deal with lesbian existence as a reality, and as a source of knowledge and power available to women; or with the institution of heterosexuality itself as a beachhead of male dominance” (p. 633). The analysis of “Cool Slut” reinforces the importance of lesbian existence.

Detailing feminist satire, its political uses and its ability to reveal lesbian readings extends to the broader sociocultural context that profits from subversive, pedagogical, and

inclusive satire. The inclusivity satire is important to emphasize here. Abrams (2017) writes about the double bind of jokes, touching on the performer's a strategy to sneak in the humor, both uplifting the universal appeal of this strategy, but also Hutcheon's "transideological politics" of irony, who questions the radical aspects of "irony skepticism," explaining that historically irony has been used to maintain the status quo. But as I explain, it is this double bind that widens the in-group of lesbian viewers for satire and desire. Feminist satire and lesbian satire is not always as subversive as many have described, nor are they homogenous⁵⁴ in strategy. For this reason, the characteristics I have described in this chapter speak to both subversion, particularly through audience, and other feminist theories that interpret ongoing objectification in the video's lyric- and image-oriented messaging. My arguments realize intersectional receptions, of at least "public fantasies" and a viewer's "voluntary and involuntary private fantasies" (Ellsworth, Larson, & Selvin, 1986, p. 62), resting on the use of in-groups and out-groups and a recognition of their limitation.

⁵⁴ Davies (2004) argues that jokes do not fit in well with ideology. He also argues that utilizing the functionalist notion of groups in scholarship on humor is limited in value.

CHAPTER VI

MUSIC VIDEO AS BRAND

The bio section of Sub Pop Record's Instagram account reads "Going out of business since 1988." Chastity Belt's record label Hardly Art is one of Sub Pop's "sister labels" according to Hardly Art's About page. As an offshoot of the larger label owned by Warner, Hardly Art has the task of scouting out emerging talent. The purpose of the chapter is to explore how the ethos of Sub Pop's culture, which uses that kind of branding, translates into the "Cool Slut" music video. A visual social semiotic analysis primarily focuses on the representational, compositional and interactive metafunctions to create meaning, which goes beyond traditional, structural semiotics in how it looks at discourses of power. Here, I briefly examine industry, or those pertinent capitalistic influences in music business that manifests in the music video. Production is a process of negotiation that happens within a particular market. This chapter continues digging beneath surface to advance analysis concerning the semiotic work enacted between form and how people make signs "in specific historical, cultural and institutional contexts, and how people talk about them in these contexts—plan them, teach them, justify them, critique them, etc." (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 3).

Artists are no less of a product of culture than the music and other texts they produce, or play in, seen by the viewer. Industry is a tastemaker for audience. The label's vision factors into the artist's work. While Hardly Art, a subsidiary of Sub Pop, cultivates an existing unknown talent with a sound regarded as valuable, the question remains of whether the band's content evolves because of their transition to Hardly Art. The hard-edged "Cool Slut," its video the key

focus of this study, can be found on the *Time to Go Home*'s listing, its first album with Hardly Art. The song debatably contrasts the rest of the album's dewy-eyed tracks, standing as a permanent trait despite the move towards introspective music. However, as previously discussed the meaning potentials includes a doubtful layer. In an interview, Shapiro describes the label as "chill" and "not super business-y" atmosphere (Heng, 2015). Through many interviews, band members have also mentioned the desire to take music more seriously, evidenced somewhat in *Time to Go Home* and especially in their most recent work. However, outside forces, that originate in corporate media, molds Chastity Belt to dull down their bite.⁵⁵ The confidence that Chastity Belt claims to have gotten over time, what is exuded through creative work, is not without ties to the money that presides in the technology and other below-the-line work⁵⁶ hired by the label.

Aufderheide (1986) argues that studying music videos are particularly crucial because they have a leading position in "reshaping the language of advertising," and its form "implies questions about the emerging shape of the democratic and capitalist society that creates and receives it" (Aufderheide, 1986, p. 59). His observation is one that I investigate in this chapter within the context of the "Cool Slut" music video. To analyze this "language," I describe the history of independent labels associated with the band and the elements of the "Cool Slut" music video produced through that history. History is the gateway from which I can analyze primary manifestations of market logic, which is 1) the Do-It-Yourself aesthetic guise, an element I deemed integral to the theme of temporality which casts a shadow over the video, 2) whiteness

⁵⁵ Schilt (2003) references Hebdige's notion that "in order to render a subculture non-threatening, it must be pulled into the mainstream and commodified" (p. 11, citing Hebdige, 1979).

⁵⁶ Apart from above-the-line work, Caldwell (2008) describes the identity of media business manufactured through its technology.

of indie music industry and 3) the subject of spectatorship in this new context of industry, deeming spectator as part of a marketized target audience to describe how the text positions it. These aspects are inextricably bound to a label's culture and within that, a power dynamic that constitutes that culture. Because a substantial part of my overall analysis rests on the meanings that the active audience produces, a concept elucidated by Fiske and other scholars applied in the previous chapter, the influence of music labels on artists, their autonomy and how "authentic" they are is of less concern. However, that aspect is touched upon unavoidably. In *Production Cultures*, John Caldwell (2008) argues that "leaving issues of identity at the level of audience also ignores the strategic importance that identity activities now play in modern media corporations" (p. 235). The identity of corporations is inextricably bound to the text and the artists, thus branded, which manipulates viewership. Caldwell's proposed need to look at the reflexivity of corporations is a crucial facet of examining the music video.

Beginnings

Chastity Belt initially self-released⁵⁷ on Bandcamp with an EP titled *Fuck Yourself* and did a collaboration with an EP titled *Dude*. These tracks are crude recordings, lyrically and musically. Chastity Belt's live performances have evolved over time, much like their lyrics. The band's first show was at a fraternity's battle of the bands, where they performed a song about "wearing eye liner, stealing cigarettes from our moms and surrendering to the god of punk"

⁵⁷ There is a strengthened presence of young people forging new career paths who seek autonomy, made easier with the internet. Digital technology becomes a great tool for DIY cultures because connectivity and networking with DIY are its tool for survival (Moran, 2010). Garofalo (1987) notes that agency is possible even in the face of commercial pressures, but autonomy can only ever be relative. In his article on the digitally driven independent music, Hracs (2012) writes that digital technology is democratizing the industry, but that independent artists face the dichotomy between freedom and risk, similar to Garofalo's notion of relative autonomy.

(Heng, 2015). Since then, the bands overall style has become more finely tuned starting with the era of their debut album *No Regerts* on the “independent”⁵⁸ label Help Yourself in 2013. In 2013, Chastity Belt released its first album *No Regerts* on Help Yourself Records, a label started in the same year based in both Seattle and Brooklyn. Its co-founders Sam Mouser and Matt Kolhede initially ran on the knowledge of local bands and the fleeting idea to exclusively record on inexpensive tapes (Noonan & Tady, 2015). On *Accidents on Purpose*, a podcast that covers music in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest, Mouser and Kolhede laughed about wanting to get to the point where they have their own office, running the label out of their apartment and being “incorporated” out of Mouser’s parent’s house, where physical demos are sent (Noonan & Tady, 2015). Mouser and Kolhede also spoke about the unfortunate reality of having to be exceptionally selective due to having to little money (Noonan & Tady, 2015). Seemingly, not much has changed since the podcast when the company was running with the efforts of only four folks. The label has retained an independent status, and the complete list of signed acts hovers under 20 based on what is listed on its website.⁵⁹ The label remains to be relatively unknown with only a little over 1,000 followers on Instagram. The label is now less active, although not dissolved.

Chastity Belt’s debut album *No Regerts*, released through Help Yourself, is somewhat of a continuation of what can be heard on the band’s first EPs, albeit more refined in production. The album consists of jokey feminist songs, that have a pronounced Riot Grrrl ethos, what other labels might see as a risk. The record reuptakes “James Dean” and hosts songs with titles like

⁵⁸ The distinction between major and independent labels have become increasingly blurred, now “virtually one and the same” (Garofalo, 1987).

⁵⁹ The label has discrepancies among their social media websites, which note the bands that have been on the label.

“Nip Slip,” “Giant (Vagina) and “Pussy Weed Beer.” The band’s second full-length album *Time to Go Home* marks a turn to more sincere and introspective tones in articulating a sort of women’s empowerment.

“I like when record labels put out stuff that they obviously believe in.”

“Yeah, we’ve turned down Macklemore a couple of times.”

—Accidents on Purpose dialoguing with Help Yourself Records, 2016

The untainted quality of the bands work, if one is looking from self-released music to *No Regerts*, speaks to the independent nature of the label. However, the folks at Help Yourself have their qualms about similar, but exaggerated content. Some are not given enough wherewithal to make the cut, as seen with Childbirth’s⁶⁰ first recordings. Childbirth’s debut material, through Help Yourself, was only allotted a tape, versus a vinyl, because of the 16-minute length and its “semi-serious” content (Noonan & Tady, 2015). While Chastity Belt carried with it its unique content, Help Yourself’s bands all carry the same alternative sound that Washington’s well-known port town is known to have. Selection is seemingly based on a homogeneity and reflects the same style as Hardly Art Records, Chastity Belt’s next and last move. Whether that’s the nurturing of Seattle townies or not, the haphazard style is where the money is. The strategic choice of naming the label “Help Yourself” implies a DIY ethic, the foundation of alternative subculture, despite artists not doing it themselves. Moreover, calling the music “alternative” or “indie” or the like has become a disingenuous label over time, with this genre becoming part of the mainstream. The need to examine industry reflexivity is tied to the need to unveil the realities that mainstream culture tends to commodify.

⁶⁰ Childbirth, now signed to Suicide Squeeze Records, is a band consisting of Chastity Belt’s leads singer Julia Shapiro and two other artists. Refer to Chapter II.

Reaching the Surface

For its second album, Chastity Belt made a move to Hardly Art Records, an imprint of Sub Pop. The label is said to focus on “local, proudly feminist, prominently female artists. But not exclusively” (Nelson, 2016). Hardly Art claims to have “journeyed underground while a booming Sub Pop stayed above the surface,” recovering talent from the crevices of varied, eclectic tastes, including Chastity Belt’s unconventional and relatively radical feminist persona. Hardly Art’s website highlights Chastity Belt as one of their “break out acts,” besides La Luz and Tacocat. The label has expanded because it has become a “tastemaking powerhouse.” Not unlike Help Yourself, Hardly Art and its parent label Sub Pop is known for fostering the so-called “Seattle sound” having signed bands like Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Mudhoney. While not grunge, a genre supposedly popularized by Sub Pop cofounder Bruce Pavitt, the label’s current catalogue of kindred bands includes big names like Fleet Foxes and Beach House. Charles Peterson’s (1995) *Screaming Life*, a.k.a. the name of Soundgarden’s debut EP, is a book by Peterson that documents the Seattle music scene through his photographs from its early stages. In the foreword, he describes the importance of Seattle’s music because everywhere else had “some good bands, but they just seemed to be mimicking others.” The Seattle music scene continues to be recognized as the forerunner of alternative music, burned into the public imagination thanks to Sub Pop’s effective branding.

Because of Hardly Art’s relationship to Sub Pop, briefly chronicling Sub Pop’s history is pertinent to this analysis for the purposes of showing the rapid growth and imminent assimilation into corporate world. Authored by Clark Humphrey in the late ‘90s, *Loser*, what is deemed the “real” history of the Seattle music scene, is a source that Sub Pop advertises in their Instagram bio with a hashtag. A significant portion of *Loser* is dedicated to the evolution of Sub Pop,

starting with Pavitt's Olympia-based fanzine titled *Subterranean Pop*. The zine was created in the early '80s and devoted to promoting independent records from bands outside of the big media cities, like New York and Los Angeles (Humphrey, 1999). Humphrey quotes Pavitt's statement of purpose from an early edition of the zine, stating that culture is controlled by large corporations, calling it "bland" and Sub Pop combatting this control by supporting "independent expression" (Humphrey, 1999, p. 48). The fanzine was turned into a record review column in *Rocket* and eventually incorporated into rock zines across the country. Pavitt took further steps to solidify his position in Seattle's scene by beginning a *Sub Pop* show on KCMU, eventually turning into the well-known KEXP.

Pavitt quickly gained momentum and started the label in 1986. It relatively unstable independent record label before Warner Music Group purchased 49 percent interest in the early '90s for \$20 million, a thousandfold return on the \$20,000 original investment (Bell, 1998, citing Rubin, 1995). While the desire to stay detached from large corporations fulfilled itself through substantial local action for a short time, being bought out happened anyway. It was never going to be sustainable. Bell (1998) writes that despite new ownership, Sub Pop co-founders Pavitt and partner Jonathan Poneman "maintain complete artistic control" (p. 41). While Pavitt and Poneman may have control, an issue in and of itself that interferes with artist expression, the subsummation of alternative music into the mainstream derides the sense of anti-culture on the label. Furthermore, as much as Chastity Belt attempts to express ideals that upend society, the fact of the matter is that they leach off an entity that maintains the status quo.

Making Industry Evident in Text

The label's vision pours into the artist's work to become a tastemaker for audience. While Hardly Art cultivates an existing unknown talent with a sound regarded as valuable, the question remains of whether the band's content evolves because of its transition to Hardly Art. The hard-edged "Cool Slut," its video the key focus of this study, can be found on the *Time to Go Home*'s listing, the first album with Hardly Art. The song debatably contrasts the rest of the album's dewy-eyed tracks, standing as a permanent trait despite the move towards introspective music. However, as previously discussed the meaning potentials includes a doubtful layer. Aside from the constructed gaze with the video which churns a profit, less abrasively feminist music would appeal to men more. The confidence that Chastity Belt claims to have gotten over time, what is exuded through creative work, is not without ties to the money that presides in the technology⁶¹ and male-dominated industry.

Hardly Art's self-appraisal of making taste, part of Sub Pop's legacy, logically invokes Pierre Bordieu's (1984/2018) critique on the ideology of taste. Bordieu analyzes taste with respect to its logic, how a person must have some semblance of "cultural competence" to read an art work's code and how "superimposed" interpretations of the audience threaten the artist's autonomy (p. 4). He writes that "taste classifies and it classifies the classifier" (p. 4). This classification puts into effect the positioning of the listener of music and the viewer of music video, including and excluding to sculpt the consumer base. The industry always appeals to an audience through what can be called an aesthetic advertisement, which is a feast for some and a mystery or distaste for others. This is reminiscent of the in-group and out-group dynamic applied

⁶¹ Caldwell (2008) describes the identity of media business manufactured through its technology, which, in this context, the analog aesthetics of the video.

to spectatorship in the previous chapter, where I examine the feminist and sexualized appeals brought on by the text. Here, I recognize appeal as a capitalistic endeavor by taking a bird's eye view of the music video as it exists in the market system. I primarily focus on two the facets of the text, which is to extend spectatorship into this new framework which views spectators as profit, noting sexed and raced aspects, as well as argue how marketing strategies feign the audience an authenticity. To analyze these, I highlight the video's compositional elements which speak to these lucrative tactics.

Marketizing Lo-Fi. The veil of graininess, a VHS recording-style used throughout the video harkens to Sub Pop's imposed persona, seen in statements like the one in its Instagram bio. Going out of business is cool because that means money is far from the end-all, be-all. Alternative subculture is about self-made, authentic artisanship. The music video is within the postmodern, which is linked to the branding style of the artists' label, that which preserves the past. In *Marketing: the retro revolution*, Brown (2001) writes about the revolutionary change in marketing that the retro style is bringing about. Seattle is a cultural hub that fostered the burgeoning of grunge and supposedly unique alternative music in the '80s and '90s. The people in Seattle's music scene hated corporate culture. Ironically, these same people head a lucrative label. So, why not anesthetize and marketize the location, its musical style, its appeal to DIY? Relevant to the retro, is Moore's (2004) description of the postmodern style, as it relates to punk subcultures. The art world is defined by "hybridity and intertextuality, but its license to (re)create using recycled objects and images from the past while locating the residue of previously authored texts within the modern and 'original'" (p. 305, citing Jameson, 1991). The music video's characteristics reflects this precisely.

The music video can be characterized as an ode to Riot Grrrl politics, and naturally the label's commodification of it, in how the song "Cool Slut"⁶² transposed into a different era via the lo-fi aesthetic, but problems arise from this aesthetic. Schilt (2003) notes that the "new genre of women in rock took many lessons from Riot Grrrl and the largely ignored women of the punk years: the anger towards patriarchy is present, the discussion of sexual abuse, and even the acknowledgment of female desire. But the message is diluted" (p. 14). Susan Willis' (1993) article on hardcore style is a discourse on this contradiction of a capitalism infested community, and references Hebdige (1979) cautions "no amount of stylistic incantation oppressive mode in which the commodities used in subculture production" (p. 130). As Willis (1993) accurately suggests, Hebdige's work on subculture's commodity form does not precisely translate decades later because the issue has worsened in society's de-industrialization. This post-Fordist era makes the need for reflexivity only more necessary, where oppression is often obfuscated, and radical modes of social changed are turned into an ideological product.

Buying into the Male Consumer. The target audience for various media may not be white, heteronormative men, but all producers surely do not wish to exclude this dominating crowd entirely. Historically, the alternative scenes like the one in Seattle have been exclusive to white heteronormative men. That legacy has carried on into the current era of alternative music, but really the music industry as a whole, despite Chastity Belt's presence. When looking at the male consumer, I must include the history of men excluding women in rock subcultures, punk and the new underground. In *Loser*, Humphrey writes, "It's important to note that women were involved in punk rock up front and from the start," that "punk was originally about self-empowerment and

⁶² A revolutionary tool that Riot Grrrl popularized was the reclamation of derogatory words used for women.

self-expression, not macho licentiousness” (p. 35). To evidence this, he notes a few women artists, but they are an anomaly. Humphrey is sorely mistaken, according to a plethora of historians on the subject who note the aggressively exclusionary practices of punk subculture and rock music in general (Gottlieb & Wald, 1994; Coates, 1997; Cohen, 1997; Klein, 1997; Schilt, 2003; Dunn & Farnsworth, 2012). While women were not completely absent from the scene, they more so bolstered the men around them than playing at the center. Even after Riot Grrrl’s attempt to upend this dynamic, men remained dominant, which pours over into today. The comparison of women and men who participate in today’s music industry is a grim statistic,⁶³ which is relevant to music texts because when production comes from a homogenous source, the product tends to appeal to that group of producers.

I center my argument on the male consumer to note the ways that the music video appeals to the male gaze by viewing spectatorship as a profitable institution and how the assumed predominant at large, audience shapes the actions of that institution. Mayne (2002) writes that “there would be no such thing as spectatorship if the cinema did not function as a powerful form of pleasure, entertainment, and socialization” (p. 31). She also accounts for and places importance on the dialectic, of “how film viewers are constructed and how those viewers shape the cinema institution” (p. 37). Spectatorship institutionalizes and is institutionalized. This speaks to Cohen’s (1997) argument that rock is not “naturally male”; rather, it is “actively produced” as male (p. 17). Establishing male spectatorship through production affects texts, like the “Cool Slut” video that seem to intend to appeal to only women. Attempts to encompass both the marginalized and the hegemonic is not overt but persists. Mayne notes that subjects become a

⁶³ According to research conducted by USC Annenberg, only 21.7% of women are performers, 12.5% are songwriters and 2.6% are producers and only eight out of 1,093 producing credits went to women of color, rendering women of color invisible as producers (Smith, et al., 2020).

concept through the institution. This allows men to find a space wrapped in pleasure even if that space, or text, is branded as overtly feminist and woman-communitarian, or lesbian as previously argued.⁶⁴ Desire for women on the screen in the “Cool Slut” music video context is intensified through revealing shots, even if the text is not directed at men, or lesbians, on the surface. Within the context of “Cool Slut,” the sapphic qualities still fade into the background because of the historically produced male gaze. This is a result of strategic move to appeal to a diverse range of audience members. Even if the label and its creative team consciously considered and anticipated the effect on women and lesbian audience, men are always targeted.

Entrenched White Privilege. John Caldwell (2008) insists that culture is an “interpretative system” needed to be seen embedded within a “play of power and politics” (p. 2). This play consists of an operation of racialized politics, as noted by Herman Gray (2016) in his article on diversity initiatives in the creative industries. Gray (2016) advocates for attention to “the operation of racial knowledge as a repetition of inequality (and knowledge about differences in race, gender, and sexuality) embedded in the routine habits, assumptions, practices, rituals, and organization of cultural work” (p. 249). An examination to the reflexivity of the label tends to the “deep text” proposed by Caldwell, a text that fashions the problematic structures at hand, which

⁶⁴ In “Gay for Pay,” Himberg (2018) discusses the economic forces that shape lesbian audiences. She uses *The L Word* as an example and notes that a diverse audience remains the target. Himberg highlights a *New York Times* article, which describes the potential problem with using femme representation in shows: “while femme images may challenge tradition viewers’ sense of what being lesbian looks like, these same images were constructed for the pleasure of the straight male” (p. 35). Himberg says that this concerns is about the way that the “television industry as a business commodifies images for the mainstream public, without regard for political implications, and is particularly ignorant of the content’s connection to pornography” (p. 35). To place within the context of the “Cool Slut” video, the femme representations and the ethos that classifies the video as a feminist one, going as far as to blatantly uses the male gaze, have the effect of being eye candy for men purposefully done by the label that wishes to reach a broad audience.

give rise to texts' whiteness and the industry culture of the label the use white artists to brand their label. The networking within DIY/independent music scenes, or independent labels, is ultimately the path to success and the way to stay successful but becomes problematic for people when those in power continually reinforcing the margins.

There is serious lack of Black and other people of color on the label, lending to the view that Sub Pop and its sister label Hardly Art and smaller labels like Help Yourself continue the sexed and raced rock subcultures when signing artists, molding them and their work. Being excluded from the beginning inhibits cultural competence, going back to Bourdieu, of Black artists who Sub Pop's brand discriminates against on. The brand that *is* white artists.⁶⁵ Black folks might use styles that do not jibe with independent labels, a situation based on individual taste. However, the history context of exclusion lends to the current label's landscape. The DIY practice exhibited in the aesthetics of the video, and the Riot Grrrl throwback both exist temporally and undoubtedly intertwines with identity politics.⁶⁶ Abiding by company aesthetics is made difficult when there is a history of excluding people of color, even if the music does evolve from Black tradition.⁶⁷ The historical exclusion and the disenfranchisement of Black

⁶⁵ The Pitchfork articles titled "The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie" and "What It's Like to Be Black in Indie Music" discuss the ostracization of people of color and the obstacles that black artists face specifically, evidencing the reproductions of labels' (and their artists) use of white branding.

⁶⁶ Despite efforts to bolster a more inclusive space, the Riot Grrrl movement has been criticized as a separatist and a club for white middle-class women. Nguyen (2012) details the exclusive, universalizing feminism of Riot Grrrl in her article "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival."

⁶⁷ In Garafalo's (2002) critique of Black exclusion in the music industry, he refers to this as "Black fruits, white roots" (p. 112). Rock's appropriation of Black music is noted in *Loser*, but Humphrey only describes how Black music turned into "teeny bopper fodder" (p. 7). He hardly describes how the Seattle scene was problematic, nor does his conversation on the contemporary scene acknowledge Black exclusion. His writings are romantic and idealistic.

people in rock music, such as in in underground spaces,⁶⁸ lends to one's current "cultural competence" or one's taste and one's present-day isolation in the music industry.

Conclusion

In the last section of *Loser*, Humphrey (1999) looks at the current culture of Seattle rock. He writes idealistically leaving no room for the capitalistic superstructure, arguing:

The best Seattle bands rock hard without being pretentious or slaves to fashion. They speak directly to people in a way no groomed-for-stardom act can. Even the biggest acts in the scene speak toward a post-Hollywood era, when art and entertainment are wrested from centralized corporations to become direct expressions of people's hearts (p. 199)

Never mind the year that *Loser's* second edition was published because Seattle's corporatized music world persists and has intensified over time. The styles that were anti-mainstream fashion are now the mainstream. The aesthetics, always ideological, of Seattle music and music videos look back to the era from which Humphrey writes and is monetized, however sexist or racist they are. While Chastity Belt's expressions in the "Cool Slut" video are progressive and direct, or poignant from recent works the art is produced with the aid of from one of the Big 6. That goes against the ethos of the cultural performance that the viewer immediately picks up. Humphrey writes that DIY ethic behind grunge trappings "can only grow" (p. 199). But that ethic is only a façade of branded artists and the text they are thought to authentically produce.

⁶⁸ Eversley's (2014) thesis on white space and governance in Baltimore's DIY scene the ongoing whiteness of alternative subculture. Eversley narratives the article to speak on her experience as a Black woman who observed the scene and interviewed its participants. She notes the majority white" space and the fact that it was "contained within private property," "both of which provide protection from policing" (p. 8). Eversley's participants understand the commonplace policing of Black bodies and one's claim to white privilege to hold a space that evades the cops.

Music videos do not occur in a vacuum. They are developed through a collaboration between members of a team. Depending on the size of the label, the view of music video as an enterprise dominates. With the knowledge of Sub Pop's acquisition and Hardly Art as a mere tool in its arsenal, the product is made with brand close to its core. The music video is a manufactured product that promulgates Chastity Belt's image and is used to attract other artists⁶⁹ and oust others. Caldwell (2008) describes the industrial contexts above-the-line work, in which he considers the "visual practices of corporate branding, programming, and repurposing" (p. 111). His work focuses on television and film, writing that "all screenplays are branding opportunities," that "nothing gets 'greenlighted' unless there are compelling prospects for financial success" (p. 232-233). These sentiments apply to music video to state that what music videos see is inextricably bound to capitalism, despite the "Cool Slut" video's self-reflexivity by way of satire and significant subtextual content which express a different agenda. Including the discursive effects of industry, an integral part of a context-aware social semiotic analysis, elucidates this relationship. Most important is the ways that the relationship between band and label manifests in the text. Chastity Belt is situated within the label's presumed style, which is informed by its history and the continuation breeding white alternative artists who aestheticize going against the grain.

⁶⁹ Negus writes (2013) describes how appeals are based on claims of "sympathetic conditions and supportive environment for creative work" and how music labels attract artists based on the roster of artists on the label (p. 63). This practice refies issues like white hegemony.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The way that the band constructs its identity through the music video exemplifying Hall's (1997) notion of meanings, thus identity, constantly being produced and "exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part" (p. 3). Aware of their subordinate status in society, they fashion themselves as part of space of belonging for marginalized individuals. Members of Chastity Belt poke society's objectification of women by reflexively making fun of themselves and use a variety of semiotic resources to do so. These resources allow prominent techniques, themes and ideologies to emerge. In this thesis, I focus on the band's use of temporality, appropriation of girlhood and what meanings come from juxtaposing image and song. I also expound on the use of gender stereotypes.⁷⁰ I tend to the absences by noting how the video's imagery could exclude viewers who are people of color, historically discriminated against in the rock music industry and currently. To accompany an analysis of implications of the video's compositional elements, I look to other facets that are integral to a social semiotic analysis. In this case, these are the ways that the video interacts with viewer, particularly through satire and gaze. Lastly, the context that illustrates production having an impact on consumption—industry always influences the text, creating important additional layers of meaning.

⁷⁰ See Butler's (1990/2007) *Gender Trouble* for a discussion of the subversion of identity based upon a conception of gender as a performed act.

Problematizing Feminist Reclamation

An overwhelming takeaway from the music video is the value of reclamation, a small revolutionary act that attempts to take back agency, or an act to gain it in the first place. The band attempts to instill this value through the elements that I have discussed, such as its DIY aesthetic, protection/appropriation of girlhood, gender stereotypes and the words sung throughout. However empowering reclamation may be, the means to do it is not a universal endeavor. In her article on female identity and sexuality, Attwood (2007) details the connotations of “slut” and how it has been used for sexual liberation, citing the authors of *The Ethical Slut* to note their sex positive stance. The term “slut” refers to “‘a woman whose sexuality is voracious, indiscriminate and shameful’, but reclaim it for ‘a person of any gender who has the courage to lead life according to the radical proposition that sex is nice and pleasure is good for you’” (Attwood, 2007, p. 235, citing Easton & Liszt, 1998). Attwood discusses how representations of sexuality, when they subvert middle-class values, elements of gender, class, race and sexuality are left out of the conversation. This outcome can result in exacerbating the negative preexisting conditions of lower class and Black women, echoing my discussion on the video’s depicted privilege. Privileges of middle-class, white feminists could be part of what is satirized, but the difficulty in quickly gathering this interpretation remains a concern.

Cara Wallis’s (2010) analysis of music video investigates gender display associated with subordination, domination, sexuality and aggression, using an equal number of men and women lead performers. Her findings conclude that stereotypes, thus the status quo, is reinforced. Women are sexually objectified and to some degree, women are shown as subordinate and men as aggressive even if the music video satirizes this convention through the appropriation of girlhood as an attempt to subvert patriarchal hegemony. Because she examines commercial

music videos that do not have an overtly political aim, Wallis' study does not wholly translate Chastity Belt's feminist approach. However, Wallis poses a point that gets at the byproduct of reclaiming sexuality by highlighting its perpetuation of sexualized, gendered images in music videos. Similarly, Hatton and Trautner's (2013) article on *Rolling Stone* covers elaborates on "choice feminism" in the most recent wave and its entanglement with notions of women counterintuitively maintaining their objectification.

The ways that the video's semiotic resources interact with one another to move the narrative along and how they interact with one another to create the spectator allow meanings to emerge that illuminate its feminist message, but also one that complicates the representation of any one feminist message. The appropriation of girlhood through the band member's stock character could be viewed as problematic—even if the video is read as a satire, honing oppressive conventions is reifying them. Feminist agendas that always sees the male gaze as problematic, despite its use, would claim the video to be a perpetuation of everything that it tries to upend. On the other hand, the use of gaze as an ironic, satirical device could be claimed as a productive strategy for acknowledging male-centered conventions and as I argue, recentering nonheteronormative women.

The same idea applies to the other themes that I discuss, which are always sites of contestation, i.e., the song and video considered as part of a largely introspective, album and the lo-fi aesthetic that presents a DIY ethic that connects with the Seattle location and Riot Grrrl movement. In his article on publics and counterpublics, Warner (2002) notes that although publics are a social totality, ideology pervade counterpublics. That ideology is grounded in providing a "sense of active belonging that masks or compensates for the real powerlessness of human agents in capitalist society" (Warner, 2002, p. 81). With such an aesthetics, the viewer

associates the band as an entity doing it themselves as part of a subculture, which is inauthentic due to the band's financial aid from a bigger label.

A Feminist Satire that Plays with Gaze

A thorough visual social semiotic analysis must concern itself with how the text positions the viewer. How one perceives the video, affected by satire, places them within loosely formed in- and out-groups. Any strand of feminism or ideology in the music video that could be interpreted in the video, communicated through its formal structures, cannot be clearly defined because of the video's presumed satirical nature. The ideologies, what Fairclough (1995) defines as the implicit assumptions of a text, are uprooted because satire makes concrete assumptions messy. As previously mentioned, there are views that would still characterize the video as a problematic one, in the sense that it uses what it dislikes. Nevertheless, the solidarity found among in-group members—women who have similar experiences within an oppressive social structure—is a salient textual theme that breaches feminist opposition.

What is satirized is both obvious and ambiguous, an effect of the inclusive feminist satire that exhibited throughout the video. However, humor and satire are *always* political for women:

For women, there are very many jokes embedded in the social structure. The Big Joke is not only that women are second-class citizens but that *their subordination is culturally represented as apolitical, natural, or even as privilege*. Thus, the fact that women are judged by a harsh standard of youth and beauty is presented as an opportunity for women to 'express their individuality' through fashion, starvation dieting and cosmetic surgery.

(Crawford, 1995, p. 154, Wolf, 1991; emphasis in original)

An inclusive feminist satire offers itself to different feminist perspectives but also serves to strengthen the pedagogical nature of satire. In this thesis, I have discussed it having the ability to

reach men, outside of the sexualized instances in the video that appeal to the heterosexual male's desire anyway. In the video's form of satire, lesbian viewers pick up the subtext, which is the same-sex desire among the band members seen in their interactions on screen but also to the viewer who is assumed to be woman due to its appeal to a woman's experience. If the band members are recognized as lesbian, the constructing and deconstructing of gender stereotypes that happen continuously throughout the view not only communicate something about the more complex identity of women but also lesbians, who are not always masculine.⁷¹

Kabir (1998), who analyzes Thelma and Louise's lesbian subtext, argues that "because the apparently heterosexual content is in fact heavily underlaid with the thread of lesbian desire, it is through this possibility of lesbian desire that we go beyond shared meaning, to mixed readings, and then to resistant readings," which supplies the oppositional reading. This analysis applies to "Cool Slut" as well because the music video does not directly address the lesbian, but the thread of desire is prominent to the lesbian viewer. The inclusive feminism of Chastity Belt's music video, contrary to feminism that overtly criticizes men, furthers lesbian identification and desire. This observation advances the idea that shared perceptions, a necessary component for constituting meaning of any object, is always complicated and is always being complicated in its discursive effects. While scholars like Mulvey who insist on the domineering presence of the male gaze is valid, accounting for looking lesbian spectatorship squashes the gravity of its force and allows agency that the always-active audience makes inexorable.

A key takeaway from examining how the text position the viewer is that the viewer is always active. The viewer is a productive and necessary component in the discursive identities

⁷¹ Blashill and Powlishta's (2009) study demonstrated a continued stereotyping of gay men as less masculine and more feminine than heterosexual males and lesbians. Also, it was shown that lesbians are viewed as more masculine and less feminine than heterosexual women and gay men.

that the music video produces and influences. The polysemic aspect to texts, defined by a multitude of interpretations, is an empowering part of the music video experience. However, it is also important to be critical of constructs in the music video that perpetuate societal ills. Dibben (1999) discusses how both visuals of music videos and lyrics can construct listeners as male, which create “an illusion of 'for-me-ness' that contradicts the reality of the performance which is in fact addressed to any number of viewers” (p. 336). Dibben also suggests that direct address creates the impression of direct access to the performer. The music video is fruitful site of queer reading, who allows room for the lesbian to have that direct access, yet the always-hanging-around male spectator profits from the spectacle as well.

Marketing Culture

Music videos are a marketing tool, which uses cultural points of references to elicit positive responses from the assumed audience. These manifestations of industry are potent in “Cool Slut.” Negus (1996) argues that “music video directors and recording companies have developed ways of producing and employing identifiable hooks that combine visual, lyrical and musical elements” (p. 95). Commercialism is within the creative practice of music video which attracts and distracts viewers (Negus, 1996). These dynamics allude to the insidious nature of multimodality, a social semiotic concept previous discussed, and makes imperative for a critical reading of the outside industrial influences on the text. The overwhelming use of retro aesthetics communicates a DIY ethic, a sense of authenticity, that conflicts with the reality of the band’s place in the industry. This salient use of aesthetics perfectly aligns with Chastity Belt’s home label Hardly Art and its parent label Sub Pop, who must view its artists and their products as commodity forms. Acknowledging Hardly Art as an imprint of Sub Pop, who foists upon the world that it has been going out of business since 1988 on their social media accounts.

Because the music video is a product used to appeal to consumers, the notion of a target audience is an important factor. In the previous chapter, I looked at the Seattle's music scene then and now as well as Sub Pop's current landscape to determine the probability of a largely white target audience and this influences the representational aspects of the music video. Although Chastity Belt brands themselves as feminist and communicated a feminist agenda through their work, the punk-turned-alternative subcultures of decades past have residual effects on the current age and the texts produced. This is to say that men remain to be at the forefront of a label's whose acts are mostly white men, reaffirmed through the discussion on the video's camera work that evokes the male gaze, however inadvertently it affects male viewers.

Music Matters

Negus (1996) advocates for the view of music video as a "series of repeated semiotic particles" (p. 94). He writes that "such particles combine music, image and words in particular ways that mediate music in a manner that allows for various contexts and accompanying activities" (p. 94). Analyzing the "semiotic particles" of a music video effectively reveals its social value. Social semiotics is a beneficial method to analyze music and music video and can be applied to other sites of analysis. When the method is used to analyze music in any form, it untangles the powers that exist in music—powers that society knows exists based on an almost universally-felt love for the art form. Social semiotics grants power to interpretation as a means of disrupting hegemonic discourse, drilling into the text's smaller working parts while considering the historical, social and cultural context of the text. This study adds to scholarship that makes critical reading of music video an important process, illustrating its empowering functions but also the ulterior motives found in its commodification, which has an affinity to maintain the status quo and has historically been preserved. Music, and arguably more

meaningful supplementary text—the music video—play a critical role in creating powerful social connections, bringing people together through shared experience. They are a pedagogy, shaping viewer subjectivity.

A social semiotic analysis of music video can make for thorough, comprehensive interrogation, which I have shown in significant ways. Tasha Dubriwny (2018) writes, “Given satire’s potential to unmask and deconstruct, it is a rhetorical form highly valuable to feminist activists” (p. 145). This analysis shows how a music video includes and excludes through a feminism represented through an ambivalent feminist satire, satire being a form that is “understudied, undertheorized, and unappreciated” (Dubriwny, 2018, p. 145). The modes in which the band enacts satirical rhetorical devices in their music and music video espouses Hodge and Kress’ (1988) notion of “style as ideology.” However, the ideology is up for interpretation. It arguably stands as a point of connection/relatability for those who watch it and enjoy bonding through the visual created by shared experience as well as a its subtleties being something that can appeal to multiple audiences. Media texts always have two active processes which is the “construction of identities” and the “construction of relations” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 125). The ambivalence, as argued in this thesis, provides a haven for women, specifically queer women, in the ways that that the “Cool Slut” music video constructs identity and the relations that are read as queer. However, there are observations of perpetuated hegemonies that continue oppressive legacies constructed through absence and techniques that tend to the male voyeur. In sum though, this music video broadly serves as a power for good, reminiscent of words written by Drinker (1948) on the relationship between women and music:

They must find their own symbols to remind themselves of their own peculiar power for good. They must find rituals and music to reinforce their own spirits in the crises of

womanhood. And they must have representation in the larger life of the community for the authority of the natural woman” (p. 297)

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APPENDIX A

“COOL SLUT” VIDEO NARRATIVE

Introduction

Different waterside scenes are shown. The title of the song in bold pink letters shows on screen and lingers until the band members are introduced while sitting on a bench. Their backs are turned towards the camera as they face the water. They synchronously turn to face the camera. The font disappears in the next scene when all four members come out from behind a large tree trunk. The title sequence is in the next frame, showing the band members sitting on the same bench but facing the camera and synchronously sliding their sunglasses down their nose. They stand in a line against brick building, opening umbrellas at the same time. They dance in the same setting but in a different shot.

Verse 1

When "We're just a couple of" is being sung, members plop down on a living room couch. In the next scene, vocalist Julia Shapiro plays guitar on an outside picnic table singing but to a different song. "Sluts" is sung when Shapiro is first shown. Video transitions with a ripple effect to a closer shot of her playing and singing while "Jules" is in bright pink lettering shows on the screen. The next scene shows her in a domestic space playing piano. The video transitions with an effect to show her hiding behind a chair, revealing herself, then ducking to hide again. "Jules" has remained on screen thus far.

Verse 2

Lydia Lund's, a guitarist, scenes are shown with her name also in bright pink letters. She starts off on the beach, looking at the sky through binoculars. The next scenes are of Lund with a plant book, crouching and studying a tree. She then walks through a greenhouse. While walking in the greenhouse, the camera is at a low angle. In the last shot, Lund bends down to smell flowers, tucks her hair behind her ear and looks to the camera while smiling.

Chorus

Band members skip in an open grassy field while "To all the girls in the world" is being sung by Shapiro in the track. They approach the camera at a low angle. In the next shot, they are toasting wine at a kitchen table with untouched pudding cups in the middle. The next scene returns to them dancing in front of the same brick wall shown at the beginning of the video.

Instrumental Break

Video transitions with a star zoom-out effect to Shapiro sitting in a chair with a short dress, playing clarinet. The shot jumps to the other band members look at her from the couch. They look at her longingly. Gretchen Grimm, the drummer, is laying down on the legs of Annie Truscott, the bassist and Lund. Camera goes back to Shapiro, but she is now playing a harp dramatically, wafting her hands in the air. The last shot is of the girls walking across the field, but not directly towards the camera. They wave at the camera, which is at the same low angle as before.

Verse 3

The video jumps to a close-up of rollerblades worn by Truscott, the bassist. Her name shows on the screen along with various angles of her rollerblading. At one point she moves toward the camera situated at a low angle holding up peace signs. The scene jumps to Truscott running. When she stops to tie her shoes in one frame, she looks at the camera with a big smile. Truscott

is then shown taking off a bike helmet inside a house by the door. After she removes the helmet, she whips her face and hair in the camera's direction with a fierce look. She is wearing lipstick here. When she does this, the scene fades into Grimm sitting on a shore widely smiling at the camera for the beginning of the next verse. Grimm's name shows on the screen.

Verse 4

The scene of Grimm sitting on a shore fades into her walking by a library towards the camera holding a book and quickly fades into her walking by the water on grass, also towards the camera. She is then shown dropping of library books and while she does so, she smirks at the camera. The next scene is her leaning against a wooden structure. She looks off to the water. The last scene of Grimm is her clumsily falling off the chair that Shapiro was sitting on earlier.

Chorus 2

Shapiro is in front of the familiar brick wall, playing the clarinet but with a sweatshirt on. The next scene shows Shapiro struggle to take off her sweatshirt in the house, while "Trying to take of their shirts" is sung. The next scene is of Grimm dancing, gyrating her hips, doing other silly dance moves. The next show shows the other band members sitting on the couch cheering her on. The viewer can still see Grimm's backside in the camera. The next scene is Shapiro playing the harp in the chair. The scene jumps to all four members sitting on the bench from the beginning at different angles.

Instrumental Break 2

The video shows a close-up of the band members eating the pudding cups at the kitchen table. The camera shifts focus to Truscott sensually enjoying the pudding with her eyes closed. The band members are shown walking on the field. The video transitions to them sitting, facing the

water from the bench, each of them resting their head on the next member's shoulder. The video fades to black. The last scene is of the band members sitting on the couch clapping.

APPENDIX B
“COOL SLUT” LYRICS

Introduction (Instrumental)

Verse 1

We're just a couple of sluts

Going out on the town

Fooling around

Verse 2

Getting all dressed up

Just to dress back down

Ooh

Chorus 1

To all the girls in the world

Trying to take off their shirts

Ladies it's okay to be

It's okay to be slutty

Ooh

Instrumental Break 1

Verse 3

We're just a couple of sluts

So what?

We like to fuck

Verse 4

We just wanna have some fun

Grind up on everyone

Ooh

Chorus 2

To all the girls in the world

Trying to take off their shirts

Ladies it's okay to be

It's okay to be slutty

Ooh

Instrumental Break 2